

Views from the Pews - Americans come and go

Blythe Cody's departure from the Cathedral coincides almost to the day with the 80th anniversary of an important event in our relationship with the United States, namely the arrival of the first batch of US Marines, in New Zealand to complete their training before joining the war in the Pacific. Their arrival gave us a sense of security in very troubled times, and for many New Zealanders it was their first meeting with folk from outside the Commonwealth. To the surprise of many, they didn't all look like either Gary Cooper or John Wayne, and there were big adjustments required on both sides. But there are many memories of hospitality, especially offered by Kiwi parents with sons overseas.

Many Marines from the Southern states struggled to relate to Maori, but equally there are many stories of generosity on both sides.

The Pacific war claimed many of those young lives, and time will have claimed the rest by now. So, please bear them in mind as we grapple not only with our country-to-country relationship, but also with our fascination, irritation, and (sometimes) incredulity as we watch domestic US politics unfold in our news media. We are different countries but we share a long history – as well as clergy!

We owe it to those young men to be well-informed about our shared history, both good and difficult, as we navigate challenging times which require constant adjustment.

Next time we grow exasperated with the United States, spare a thought for all who have crossed the Pacific Ocean in either direction, consider first what unites us, rather than on what divides. Pray for our respective governments and diplomatic services, follow the news as best we can, and do what it takes to honour the memories of those who have made the ultimate sacrifice.

It is a fundamental tenet of Christian thought that we continue in communion with all those who have died, that we have a continuing obligation to them and that we seek examples from all who have gone before. We have a number of difficult and nuanced choices to make

about all our Pacific neighbours, and that includes the Americans. Next time we are faced with a difficult decision in that sphere, simply ask;

“What would those Marines have wanted us to do?” They had to learn so much about us in so little a space of time – make use of their knowledge and wisdom.

Richard Swarbrick