5am in St Peter's Square and VE Day

In the week before he died, Pope Francis met our King and Queen and the Vice President of the USA. Finally, on Easter Sunday, he spoke to the world and said goodbye to the faithful in St Peter's Square. Twenty years before with two of my daughters, I queued for 20 hours to see the body of St. John Paul II at 5am in the morning! We were then joined by two of my sons for his Requiem Mass in St Peter's Square.

Through the wonders of the guidance of God, two of my family were booked to be in Rome for Pope Francis' funeral weekend and two of my daughters decided to join them in Rome. Rebecca, our youngest was visiting from Perth Australia. On the morning of the funeral, they queued from 5am in St Peter's Square and stood behind the seated clergy for the Requiem Mass! On the Sunday they attended Mass at the English college and afterwards had a tete-a-tete with Cardinal Vincent Nicols and with their special guest none other than the Archbishop of Perth, Western Australia, Rebecca's own Archbishop!!

Nobody of faith can deny the guidance of the Holy Spirit and the legacy of Pope Francis in the meeting of the two Presidents of the USA and Ukraine in St. Peter's - may a just and lasting peace come to that conflict. Now, after that world shaking historic few days, we need prayers and guidance of the Holy Spirit, as the conclave of cardinals meets to choose our next Pope, "The Servant of The Servants of God", and we celebrate the 80th anniversary of VE Day, although the war did not end until August 15th.

The same age as the Pope, I was 8 years old on VE Day. The 8th of May 1945 was a bright sunny day in Windsor and opposite the foot guard's barracks was the Acre. In the morning, the Grenadier Guards built the largest bonfire one could imagine on the Acre. The afternoon was taken up by street parties where all the goodies one had been deprived of during the war magically appeared – Yum Yum!! Everyone was happy and all the church bells rang out to give thanks to God for our safe deliverance. In the evening everyone went to the Acre and danced round the bonfire and got partly cooked.

What had the War been like? On the 5th January 1940 my Horse Guard father sailed with the 1st Cavalry Division for Haifa and did not return home at all for 5 and a half years. He served in Palestine, Italy and Greece and finished the war as a Major in the Special Operation Executive (SOE). His brother fought at Monte Cassino and El Alamein and my mother's young cousin was a bomber navigator in the RAF. Then, in

July 1942, a telegram arrived - normally not good news - my mother returned from the front door crying telegram in hand. My elder brother was also crying - who was it and what had happened? My mother's cousin, who she had lived with after she was orphaned by war at 15, was missing/presumed dead aged 23 years!

In 1944, walking up Peascod Street to the cinema, suddenly there was a loud hum overhead then it stopped, and the strange plane disappeared and there was a loud explosion and the shop window we were passing cracked from corner to corner - it was a VI flying bomb that killed two people nearby!

Finally, a few days before VE Day the Pathe News showed British troops liberating the Bergen/Belsen concentration camp - the ultimate of man's inhumanity to man! At Sunday school they taught us about Jesus in the Holy Land and King Richard the Lionheart's crusades. My Dad was a Horse Guard in the Holy Land, my name was Richard, so I lapped up the stories and developed a deep faith that I have never lost, despite having the first name Thomas (mute)! War took away both of my grandfathers before I was born and two cousins and absented my father for five and a half years - what a pointless waste, they were aged 23 to 42!

May God grant us a peaceful world and may Pope Francis rest in peace.

T Richard Layzell