Throughout human history, there have been many moments where we look back and ask, “how could this have happened?” And what we find is that while we learn from the past, because of the effects of sin and evil, evil continues in part because so many people consent to it thinking it to be justified, and others do nothing to speak up against it.

But then there are those who stand up to it. And as for why they do, the answer is because they serve a higher King, not an earthly one. From World War II during the Holocaust, you might not know that a number of these people were in fact Catholic.

Sister Agnes Walsh is one of just 13 British men and women to be honored as a Righteous Among Nations, or Righteous Gentile, by Yad Vashem, Israel’s official memorial honoring the Holocaust victims.

The Catholic nun was born Clare Walsh in Hull in 1896 and entered the Daughters of Charity in 1916, working first in Ireland and then in Palestine.

Following a fall she was sent to St Vincent de Paul convent in France, to recuperate and when war broke out she found herself in occupied territory.

In December 1943, during manhunts for Jews in the area, Pierre Cremieux, a French Jew, asked the nuns to hide his wife, seven-year-old son and four-month-old twins.

Sister Agnes, in spite of risks to herself if the Germans found out that she was English, pleaded with her superior, Sister Granier, to shelter the family until liberation.

The family stayed in touch with the nun after the war and their testimony led to her recognition by Yad Vashem in 1990 at 94. She died in 1993.

Fr Jacques de Jesus was a French Carmelite and headmaster of the Petit Collège Sainte-Thérèse de l'Enfant-Jésus. Born in Bunel in 1900 he died, emaciated and broken by tuberculosis, in Linz, Austria, in 1944 shortly after he was liberated from Mauthausen death camp, having been sent there for sheltering Jewish boys in his school. The priest's story is recounted in Au revoir les enfants, Louis Malle's classic movie of 1987.

The priest had turned the boys 'school into a refuge both for young men seeking to avoid forced labour in Germany and for Jews trying to escape the Holocaust. He enrolled three Jewish boys – Hans-Helmut Michel, Jacques-France Halpern and Maurice Schlosser – under false names, and helped to hide three other Jews – including two adults. He did this by creating jobs for two them at the school and gave sanctuary to the third by arranging shelter for him with a local villager.

He was arrested by the Gestapo on January 15, 1944 and the Jewish boys were transported to Auschwitz where they perished. Fr Jacques was honoured as a Righteous Gentile by Yad Vashem in 1985.

Blessed Bernhard Lichtenberg was a German Catholic priest who had served as a military chaplain in the First World War. He was 62 years old and the provost of the Cathedral of St Hedwig in Berlin when Kristallnacht, the notorious Nazi pogrom, convulsed Germany.

He responded to the atrocity by closing each evening's Mass with a prayer for "the Jews and the other poor prisoners in the concentration camps".

On October 23 1942 he also offered a public prayer for Jews who were being deported to the death camps of the East, urging worshippers to observe Christ's commandment to "love their neighbour" specifically in relation to the Jews.

Blessed Bernhard was denounced to the authorities. He stood trial and was sentenced to two years of hard labour in Dachau concentration camp but died "on the way". His tomb is in St Hedwig's cathedral.

The priest was also a courageous critic of the Nazi euthanasia program, writing in protest to the chief medical officer of the Reich.

He was beatified by Pope John Paul II on June 23 1996.

And then there is Stanisława Leszczyńska

Stanisława Leszczyńska was a Catholic midwife who worked in the "maternity ward" at Auschwitz concentration camp, delivering more than 3,000 babies in two years, half of whom were murdered by drowning in barrels while a further 1,000 died from hypothermia and malnutrition. The

mothers were wanted for labour but the babies were considered to be useless.

The pious Leszczyńska, from Łódź, Poland, risked her own life by refusing to participate in the infanticide, defying Dr Joseph Mengele to his face, prompting him to bellow angrily at her: “An order is an order!”. But she bravely faced him down. Instead of taking a single life she was later able to claim that under her care not one mother or baby died.

Leszczyńska was sustained by her Catholic faith. She would make the Sign of the Cross and pray before each delivery and when she could she would baptize children before they were killed.

These are just of the few of the stories from World War II, and there are many more as well. But all of them share a similar theme, and that is of people understanding who their King is, and emulating His Kingship.

As King, Christ sets things right. When we look to humanity, on the one hand we see the effects of evil. Right at the start in Genesis after human beings chose to violate God’s law, we see the snowball effect of sin which

continues to this very day. And while God could certainly intervene and eliminate all evil if He so choose, He wants humans to be involved; He does not want people to be robots. We can see evil, but also learn how to respond to it so we become better people. In the Old Testament, we see numerous leaders chosen such as Moses, David, Noah and many others. But they all falter as well at various points. God though wanted to continue to work through humanity, and so He sends His son. In our second reading from Paul to the Colossians he says: ***"He delivered us from the power of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins."*** So as a starting point, when we look to God, we see that infinite mercy. The kind of mercy seen by the Good Thief who is told that today, he will be with Jesus in paradise. Everyone else sees a failure; the Good Thief sees Goodness itself. So, do we in our lives? Do we trust that His mercy is always there for us to liberate us as well and set us free? Do we get to know this King who knows us so well, or are we just as blind to Him as those who executed Him? The point is that, if we mean it when we say we believe in Jesus, we must let Him in to set us free from sin, and follow His example to help liberate one another and counter evil just as Jesus definitively countered it on Calvary.

Coming to know the King, we come to know what His mission is all about. Jesus wages war, a kingly responsibility, intent on combatting the true enemies of humanity, the forces of sin, and Satan, and behind them, the power of death; the forces that prevent us mere creatures fulfilling our God-given calling. And this is where the light vanquishes the darkness; the Good Thief seeing Jesus for who is is and mercy triumphing, but also in the stories of people like Sister Agnes Walsh, Fr. Bernhard Lichtenberg and Stanisława Leszczyńska. Like them, we are the people through whom grace must shine. As put by Br. Andrew Brookes, a Dominican Brother: ***"We are called to reign with him by bringing all our personal powers under his truth and rule, and by actively building his kingdom around us, offering participation in it to others. We do this on a daily basis, living and dying as he did, for the earth is still a battlefield. The battle and hopefully the victory that King Jesus fought during his life on earth will play out in our lives. We can draw on his kingly power by faith, exercise it by love, and hope to share its fulness, and see our King face to face, in the future."*** Jesus' first words as He began His ministry were "The Kingdom of God is at hand," and that is what happened in those moments in World War II when God's servants helped light shine

through the darkness. God uses people to make this world a better place and bring about His Kingdom here and now. CS Lewis, in “The Case for Christianity” wrote: ***“God created things which had free will. That means creatures which can go wrong or right. Some people think they can imagine a creature which was free but had no possibility of going wrong, but I can't. If a thing is free to be good it's also free to be bad. And free will is what has made evil possible. Why, then, did God give them free will? Because free will, though it makes evil possible, is also the only thing that makes possible any love or goodness or joy worth having. A world of automata -of creatures that worked like machines- would hardly be worth creating. The happiness which God designs for His higher creatures is the happiness of being freely, voluntarily united to Him and to each other in an ecstasy of love and delight compared with which the most rapturous love between a man and a woman on this earth is mere milk and water. And for that they've got to be free…Of course God knew what would happen if they used their freedom the wrong way: apparently, He thought it worth the risk. (...) If God thinks this state of war in the universe a price worth paying for free will -that is, for making a real world in which creatures can do real good or harm and something of real***

importance can happen, instead of a toy world which only moves when He pulls the strings - then we may take it it is worth paying."

Jesus our King indeed paid the price for us; those martyrs and those who suffered for the greater good in World War II and who have suffered up and down the ages paid it too. So recognizing that we are in fact in battle, in a state of war with evil and sin, it begs the question for you and me how do we live our Kingship? The King wants us in His army. We are called to participate in His work; this is the Church militant. So are we willing to go into battle? It takes so many forms. Knowing our faith and defending it. Not being silent in the face of evil. A willingness to be ridiculed and mocked for the faith. As a king imprinted his image on a coin as a sign of power, each human is made in the image of God and we are called to remind people of who God is and how to respond to God. So many people though go astray and get lost, which is why so many people don't go to Mass, why so many people embrace moral relativism or a "whatever works for you" kind of mentality, stay silent in the face of evil or become self-serving or use others. This is where you and I step in and announce Christ's Kingship with every fiber of our being. Doing so is costly and will result in us being mocked and hated by some, but it will also result in people going to heaven so long as we are willing to go out into battle.

Jesus wants to be King over every aspect of our lives, but His love is never forced. So invite this King into every part of your soul realizing His light and love shine on the good and the bad, and follow this King into battle to bring that light into the world by announcing His Kingdom with every fiber of your being rather than giving up. When you look at all the evil that occurred after humanity was created, God could have easily given up on the world. But He didn't. And He didn't on Good Friday either with the Son was killed, but ultimately triumphed, because as the Good Thief saw who Jesus really was, Jesus also saw who we were too, which is why He also said forgive them, they know not what they do. He saw the potential in us for such good, the good that is seen in so many people who go into battle daily as part of God's army. The battle lasts a lifetime, but while darkness will have its moment, the power of good will ultimately triumph because of the power of our King, and the people in His army like Sister Agnes Walsh, Fr Jacques de Jesus, Fr. Bernhard Lichtenberg, Stanisława Leszczyńska, and so many who daily go into battle with their King. As Christian soldiers, may we do the same as we bring the Kingdom of Heaven into the world, confident that with Christ our King and leader, love, mercy and good will ultimately triumph as together we announce the Kingdom of God is at hand.