

29th June 2021

Wars

“No se puede mirar.”

“One cannot look on this.”

Goya (Francisco José de Goya y Lucientes)

Title of one of the 1863 etchings in “The Disasters of War”

“The Disasters of War” (*Los desastres de la Guerra*) is a series of prints created between 1810 and 1820 by the Spanish painter, Goya. They are now viewed by art historians as a visual protest against the violence of the 1808 “Dos de Mayo Uprising” and the subsequent Peninsular War of 1808-14, though the artist said nothing about that at the time of his work.

Goya was in failing health and almost deaf when he began work on the prints. They weren’t published until 1883, thirty-five years after his death, when it was considered politically safe to do so. The name we now have for the prints wasn’t Goya’s choice. His handwritten title on an album of proofs was “Fatal consequences of Spain’s bloody war with Bonaparte, and other emphatic caprices.” But “Disasters of War” is right! One art historian writes: “[Goya] rejects the bombastic heroics of most previous Spanish war art to show the effect of conflict on individuals.”

Of course, the fabric and future of a nation is gravely affected by war. But when nation pits itself against nation, their wars are fought by individuals, and it is individual men, women and children who suffer. This is, indeed, the disaster of war.

Tom Paxton, in his song, *When Princes Meet*, puts it this way:

When kings make war, the poor little men must fight them.

They must do more – they hold out their necks

for the great men’s swords to bite them;

the sons of the lords cleave through their ranks

in the hope some warrior king might knight them.

That’s what the poor little men are for, when kings make war.

No wonder one of Goya’s etchings is named *No se puede mirar*, “One cannot look on this”. When we look on the suffering of any individual in a war, should we not be distressed? And when we are distressed, should we not commit ourselves to giving our all for justice and peace?

A prayer for today

Today we pray for all those affected by war – individual people, just like us.

Today we pray that every individual will give their all to avoid the disasters of war.

An original reflection by © Tom Gordon Also available at <https://swallowsnestnet.wordpress.com>