

Thought for the week;

In the end, God.

I have recently been offering prayers for individuals who have either died alone or who will almost certainly die without their closest relatives with them. The thought of a solitary death is something that many of us find particularly difficult; likewise, a death in the absence of our family and friends is troubling enough and the first relaxation of the lockdown was to allow people to be physically with their loved ones at the end. Sadly, that is not always possible.

Religious faith does not protect against grief or fears; those emotions are part of our human condition and are built into us. But it does offer us another view of the end of life. Psalm 139 is perhaps my favourite psalm and it has important things to say about a God from whose love who we cannot escape, even in despair and death:

Where can I go then from your spirit? Or where can I flee from your presence?

If I climb up to heaven, you are there; if I make the grave my bed, you are there also.

If I take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea,

Even there your hand shall lead me, your right hand hold me fast.

If I say, 'Surely the darkness will cover me and the light around me turn to night,'

Even darkness is no darkness with you; the night is as clear as the day; darkness and light to you are both alike.

The priest and poet, Malcolm Guite, has recently written about the death of a homeless man. He had had his portrait painted some time before he died and the picture now hangs in the Cambridge college at which Guite is based. For Guite, looking at this picture is a reminder that Christ gazes at all humanity with the care and love of a portrait artist, for he is our creator. And at our end, it is Christ, perhaps only Christ, who will be always present, and who will take our right hand to lead us into his Kingdom. For us all, in the end, God.