

Thought for the Day 3rd July - John Reed

Read 1 Corinthians 13:1-13

While serving as the BBC's adviser on Roman Catholic affairs, the English Franciscan Father Andrew Agnellus received a letter one day from a producer asking how he might ascertain the official Roman Catholic view of heaven and hell. Andrew answered him in a memorandum comprising a single word: "Die."

At one level, that would seem to be about the only answer anyone can give. Surely such things are hidden in the mind of God, unavailable to our limited understanding, and the only way we ever find out the truth is when we meet God face-to-face?

Those who feel this way often quote the apostle Paul, when he wrote: *"Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known"* (1 Corinthians 13:12).

This passage will be familiar to those who attend weddings. In my experience, roughly 90% of couples request this passage to be read at their wedding, because it speaks so eloquently of love. But it should be noted that Paul is not speaking here of marriage. He is speaking of the love we are to have for each other in the church. That love is modelled on God's love for us. Which now we only see in part, "as in a mirror." Now, it must be remembered that mirrors in Paul's experience were polished sheets of metal, and the reflection therein was nothing like as clear as you saw in your bathroom ablutions this morning. So he was saying that our current knowledge and experience of God's love is limited and blurry. But one day, we will see it in its full HD, 4K, technicolor glory.

The Greek philosopher Plato proposed that everything we experience in this world is but a poor shadow of the true reality that exists in heaven. Plato used the allegory of prisoners chained a cave. Behind the prisoners are people moving, carrying objects. The prisoners can't see the people or objects, but can see their shadows, cast by a fire, on the wall in front of them. Because all they have ever seen is the shadows, the prisoners believe these are all there is. Imagine the chains being removed and turning around to experience the reality ...

Fortunately, God has not left us in the dark. Philip, one of Jesus' disciples, said to him: *"Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough for us."* To which Jesus replied: *"Don't you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father'? Don't you believe that I am in the Father, and that the Father is in me?"* (John 14:8-10).

God has not left us to stare at shadows. He has shown us the reality, coming among us in the flesh, in the person of Jesus, so that we can know him as he truly is. Yes, Paul says, sometimes our understanding is limited. There is more to God than we can ever grasp in this life. But that's not to say that we can't know him at all. We can be confident that if we know Jesus, we know God as he truly is.