



A THOUGHT FOR THE WEEKEND

16th June, 2023

"...all the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be.....
when I awake I am still with you"
Psalm 139:16,18

The subject of death is topical in The Hub's programme just now, and with today's instant news and communications, we seem to be more aware of shocking loss of life in wars, terrorism, suppression and persecution, as well as through deprivation, starvation, crime and brutality. Every victim is someone's child, partner, relative, friend.

I have visited some of the war-grave cemeteries in France and Belgium and have been moved also by the thousands who have no known grave, whose names are inscribed on memorials such as the Menin Gate in Ypres and the massive Thiepval Memorial on the Somme. Linked to those names are the countless gravestones marking unidentified remains. In French cemeteries such graves are marked with a simple cross and the one word "*Inconnu*", -unknown. On German graves the words are, "*Ein unbekannter Deutscher Soldat*" -an unknown German Soldier. British and Commonwealth stones have something more: "*A Soldier of the Great War...Known unto God*".

It reminds me of Ecclesiasticus 44:9 and 14, in the Apocrypha, "*...some there be, who have no memorial; who are perished, as though they had never been; Their bodies are buried in peace; but their name lives for evermore.*". So in what sense are these loved ones '*inconnu*'? In whose mind and heart does their name "*live for evermore*"? Whether they have a known grave or not, what can we believe about them? What sense can we make of the sheer fragility of human life which touches all of us?

Those insightful words "*known unto God*", inscribed on anonymous graves, help us. Psalm 139:7-8 says: "*Where can I flee from your presence? If I go up to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths, you are there.*" The Psalm speaks of the loving intimacy with which God fashions our bodies; it is the love of a father who feels beneath his hand his unborn child moving within its mother. "*...when I was woven together in the depths of the earth your eyes saw my unformed body;*" (v.15-16). Does such love end in the cold anonymity of an unmarked grave? No! "*.... when I awake I am still with you.*" (v. 18) This is God, -the Father who has the number of our days already written, but who has the final word in resurrection and eternal life with him.

Many humanly unanswerable questions are raised in any thoughtful mind, but we can find refuge in God, who over-arches the human predicament, -the Father to whom the '*Inconnu*' are *fully known*, who knew the number of their days before one of them came to be, who holds each child in his everlasting, loving, parental arms. He is the same God who created our inmost being and by whom we are deeply known even when we feel unknown, and who seeks and saves us when we are lost. So we may say, confidently, with the Psalmist, "*When I awake, I am still with you*".