

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY 11th APRIL 2016

Good Morning

Fathers are in the news.

There's the weekend revelation that the birth father of the Archbishop of Canterbury was Sir Anthony Montague Brown, a Private Secretary to Winston Churchill.

And there's been the scrutiny of the investments of Ian Cameron, the Prime Minister's father, who was a stock-broker.

Beneath the surface of newsprint there'll be strong undercurrents of emotion for all concerned that touch on family, fatherhood, filial loyalty and identity.

Those who live in the public eye carry a cross on which their lives and their families are constantly under scrutiny.

I know some will think that this is the price they should be prepared to pay for accepting office or power. But the relentless invasion of privacy could well deter good people from standing for election.

I've lost count of the times I've heard people despair at the poor slate of candidates offering to be the American President. Is there anyone with such a spotless background that they could see off such intense media scrutiny?

Yet I'm conscious that even talking about these issues adds to the pressure so let me ponder simply on the concept of fatherhood. Not least because in this centenary season, the 1st World War saw 'the biggest loss of fathers in modern British history' when more than half a million children were left fatherless. And in our own time well over 100,000 fathers have no contact with their children.

Definitions of fatherhood are difficult in an age that melts the difference between men and women. But in the Lord's Prayer Jesus paints a picture of a father who gives us our daily bread, forgives and delivers us from evil. That's not to say that a mother can't also be provider, forgiver and protector, but it offers a model to any man wondering what his role should be when fathering a child.

I've been struck by my contact with prisoners that it's often when an offender becomes a father that he begins to break out of the cycle of re-offending, when he feels the unspoken hope of a child for him to provide and protect.

But not every child is so blessed.

Even Jesus in the last moments of his life felt abandoned by God his father. And when he cried out, "Why have you forsaken me?" it was the silent presence of his mother at the foot of his cross that consoled him.

It's why Christians have always believed that Christ identifies with 'the fatherless and the widow', for those who need someone to be their provider and protector.

The Rt Revd James Jones

