

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY – TUESDAY, 5<sup>TH</sup> NOVEMBER, 2024  
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Good morning.

Some people will be looking forward to this evening's Guy Fawkes celebrations with fireworks lighting up the autumn sky. For others, bonfire night is an endurance test. I'm scared of fireworks, so I'll be cowering indoors with my fingers in my ears. This will be a terrifying night for family pets and wildlife, and for people who have lived in war zones, whose trauma is reactivated by every explosion.

But the ambiguity of Guy Fawkes goes deeper than a fear of fireworks. We might ask how a potentially catastrophic act of what today we would call terrorism became a nationwide excuse for a party. When Catholics were experiencing persecution under the Protestant King James I, Guido Fawkes and his Catholic co-conspirators plotted to kill the king and others by blowing up Parliament during its State Opening on the 5th of November 1605. The plot was foiled and those involved were tortured and killed. A few months later, the king passed a thanksgiving act calling for a special church service, bonfires and fireworks to celebrate his deliverance. Thankfully, today, such sentiments are not part of the many communal fireworks displays.

However, we're naïve if we believe that this story is too far in the past to worry us today. Many people living under oppression commit violent acts of resistance and suffer terrible punishments. Democracy is a fragile and vulnerable defence against such tyranny. It's easily destroyed by being allowed to wither because of apathy. That's why voting in general elections is an awesome responsibility for citizens of the world's democracies, especially in these volatile times.

Christians pray for God's kingdom to come on earth as it is in heaven. This idea has been used to justify the conquest of peoples and the building of empires in the name of Christian civilization. Some today are once again promoting this politicised version of Christianity. Against such abuse of religious and political power, are Christians who dedicate themselves to the quest for justice and peace, inspired by the radical vulnerability and love of God that they see revealed in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. Responsible citizenship means people of faith must balance what they believe to be eternally true about the love and justice of God, with the pragmatic compromises needed to ensure that the quest for justice is embedded within society's imperfect but necessary institutions, laws and policies.

As Americans go to the polls, weighing personal, community and national concerns, much is made of the role that Christians and other faiths groups will play in determining the outcome. How might their understanding of the nature of righteousness influence their vote today? The world is watching with baited breath.