

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY – THURSDAY, 1ST AUGUST, 2024
PROFESSOR TINA BEATTIE, writer and Catholic theologian

“You are what you love”

Jenni Stancombe’s seven-year-old daughter Elsie Dot died in Monday’s attack on a Taylor-Swift themed dance workshop in Southport. This grieving mother has pleaded for an end to the violence that erupted when a mob descended on the town and vandalised the local mosque, whipped up by false stories circulating in social media about the identity of the attacker. Elsie’s mother praised the heroic efforts of the police and said, “we don’t need this”.

For me, the most memorable image from those shameful scenes was a woman who stood in the midst of the rioters with a placard saying, “Hope not Hate. Racism Not Welcome Here”. That woman’s protest, and Jenni Stancombe’s appeal for peace, were acts of courage, as is the quiet dignity of all who refuse to allow their sorrow and loss to be hijacked by those driven by hatred and vengeance.

From the kibbutzes of Israel to the bombed homes of Gaza to the little girls at that workshop in Southport, we are daily reminded that all that we cherish most can be snatched away in an instant. This can make us over-protective and so risk-averse that, instead of love casting out fear, as the New Testament says it does (1 John 4: 18), it imprisons us in fear and anxiety. It takes great courage to love, for love makes us vulnerable.

Ultimately, fear is love’s enemy, for love cannot be defended against loss and grief; the most profound love must risk the greatest sorrow. When the infant Jesus’s parents presented him at the temple in keeping with Jewish custom, the elderly Simeon warned his mother of the heartache to come. Mary at the foot of the cross stands with every mother whose heart has been broken by the suffering of her child. Those who have not been in that darkest of places must be careful what we say, for no words can soothe such agony. Still, each of us has a small part to play in nurturing memories that honour those who have died, and resisting those who would use the loss of others to justify their own violence.

Taylor Swift’s song, *Daylight*, is about the difficulty of learning to love without fear and hatred, of discovering that love is not black and white but as golden as daylight. The song ends with a line from Saint Augustine: “You are what you love”.

I am what I love. That means my way of loving defines who I am. To be free in and for love, I must learn to let go of fear, and to be thankful for every moment of life for the fragile, fleeting gift that it is.