

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY – TUESDAY, 4TH MAY, 2021
PROFESSOR TINA BEATTIE, writer and Catholic theologian

“JESUS, MARY, JOSEPH AND THE WEE DONKEY”

Good morning.

Two recent BBC television series have provided compelling Sunday night viewing for many of us – *Call the Midwife*, followed by *Line of Duty*. I’ll avoid any spoilers for those who haven’t watched this week’s final episode.

The faith of *Line of Duty*’s Superintendent Ted Hastings (played by Adrian Dunbar), has been a matter of widespread speculation. He even made the cover of the Catholic weekly *The Tablet*. His Catholic mutterings could be taken as mild expletives or prayers, maybe both. His words “Jesus, Mary and Joseph and the wee donkey” have gone viral on social media.

Hastings is a compromised character and all the more credible for being so. His mistakes weigh heavily upon him, but he also has a passion for justice. His set pieces are all about the need for integrity, accountability and truth in public life. In the final episode, he speaks of atonement, and he says, “Who’s going to judge what I did? Her, the law, my colleagues, God?” Hastings’ sense of justice flows from his faith in a just God to whom he is ultimately accountable beyond all corrupted human laws and institutions.

In different ways, *Line of Duty* and *Call the Midwife* illustrate two key biblical themes: justice and mercy. The characters and storylines might easily invite reflection on the prophet Zechariah’s words: “This is what the Lord Almighty said: ‘Administer true justice; show mercy and compassion to one another. Do not oppress the widow or the fatherless, the foreigner or the poor. Do not plot evil against each other.’”

True justice is merciful and compassionate. It has a concern for the vulnerable, and it can accommodate our regrets and remorse, for we share with Hastings the less than perfect realities of the human condition.

Mercy shines through the vocations of the religious sisters in *Call the Midwife*. For me, the closing lines of Sunday night’s episode segued seamlessly into the final episode of *Line of Duty*. The narrator, read by Vanessa Redgrave, reflects on how together in mutual support “We listen, we witness, we learn, and we love.” She observes that “Being human is not always easy, but it can be so very beautiful.” I see that wounded beauty shining through some of the flawed central characters in *Line of Duty*, with their pursuit of justice through all those tangled labyrinths of loyalty and betrayal, compromise and corruption, loss, sorrow and love.