

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY – TUESDAY, 14TH JULY 2026

PROFESSOR TINA BEATTIE – writer and Catholic theologian

Good morning.

Ann Widdecombe's violent death has shocked and saddened many. She was a Marmite politician, passionate and outspoken in her views, who aroused strong feelings at either end of the political spectrum. Yet she came to be held in great affection by many who did not share her politics. Her sense of humour and ability not to take herself too seriously were evident in her appearances on *Strictly Come Dancing* and *Celebrity Big Brother*.

She could seem uncompromisingly adamant in some of her views. Less well known was her quiet care for those on the margins of society. She never used this as a political platform. Indeed, she was furious when the media got hold of a story about her taking rough sleepers around Westminster Cathedral to the local burger bar. That story was private, she insisted, and had nothing to do with her public profile. I find myself thinking of Jesus's instruction, "when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing." Charitable acts are not for gaining votes and public admiration.

Her politics were inseparable from her devout Catholicism. My Catholic faith may lead me to a different political vision, but I respected her integrity and honesty. She was a politician of conviction, free from the media training that makes many come across as bland and non-committal, so that they begin to sound like Shakespeare's King Leontes: "I am a feather for each wind that blows". If you voted for Ann Widdecombe, you knew what you were voting for.

The Book of Deuteronomy commands the people of Israel to "love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength". When Jesus quoted that commandment, he included the "mind": "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength." Whatever one thought of Ann Widdecombe's politics, they were informed by a sharp, unflinching intellect. To use our minds means drawing on our God-given capacities for reason, conscience, and informed intellectual analysis to navigate our way through challenging moral and political questions. Christians are not called to agree on every issue. Reasoned reflection will lead to different positions, but these should inspire robust but respectful debate – an ability to disagree agreeably, to quote from Rory Stewart and Alasdair Campbell's podcast, *The Rest Is Politics*.

Catholics—gathered for Mass last Sunday—would have prayed for all those who have fallen asleep in the hope of the resurrection to be welcomed into the light of God's face. Many will have had Ann Widdecombe in mind.