

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY – TUESDAY, 22ND SEPTEMBER, 2026
PROFESSOR TINA BEATTIE – writer and Catholic theologian

Good morning.

I'm fascinated by the lives of the saints. Their stories and legends have, over two millennia, exemplified the diverse cultures and characteristics that make up the Christian faith.

In 961 AD, the Holy Roman Emperor Otto I named third century Egyptian martyr St Maurice as the Protector of Magdeburg. Today is St Maurice's feast day. A thirteenth century statue of the saint in Magdeburg Cathedral shows him as a Black African knight. It's one of the earliest realistic representations of a Black African in medieval European art.

Magdeburg is the capital city of Saxony-Anhalt in Germany, and many took to the city's streets to celebrate the recent election victory of the Far Right AfD party, with its anti-immigration message of 'Germany first'. The elections in Germany are sending shockwaves through Europe, as that party has now won two regional elections – in Saxony-Anhalt and in Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania.

Last year, Bishop Gerhard Freige of Magdeburg criticised the AfD's use of Christian rhetoric in an attempt to present itself under "a Christian guise". The appropriation of Christian symbols and ideas by some on the Far Right is a growing trend across the western democracies.

But is it really true that European history supports this version of Christianity? St Maurice points to a more complex reality. He is a reminder that Christian Europe has always been diverse and multicultural. Maurice's biography tells of his martyrdom on account of his refusal to obey orders by the Roman Emperor to attack fellow Christians. He died opposing the tyranny of earthly rulers.

Every generation interprets the lives of the saints through its own cultural lenses, but that Black African statue of St Maurice in Magdeburg Cathedral challenges the idea that the Christian West was ever essentially white. This ancient Egyptian martyr stands as a reminder that Christian Europe is a richly diverse tradition with many different ethnic and cultural identities.

Today, mainstream churches stand side by side with those of other faith communities to promote dialogue and foster bonds of solidarity in the face of growing political, economic and environmental crises. Christ calls his disciples to follow the path of peace. The saints are those who, like the good Samaritan, reach out to all who need compassion and care, regardless of race, creed or religion.