

Thought for the Day 18th July 2020 from Canon Bob Shaw

It was 35 years ago during my parish ministry in Chapelton that I received the 'Onion Story' from a friend of one of my parishioners. By a strange coincidence the friend lived in the same street within the parish of Far Headingley where my wife and I now live in retirement! By another coincidence the house next door to the story sender has been operating as a collection point for food donations during this global pandemic.

I subsequently discovered that the original version of the 'Onion Story' came from Fyodor Dostoyevsky's novel 'The Brothers Karamazov', highly recommended reading to stimulate our thinking during these challenging days. The story might encourage us to review our own lives and respond in a more loving and generous way towards our neighbours, near and afar, at this time of unprecedented human need.

The Onion Story

There was once a woman who was very respectable and highly respected. She did everything she thought she ought and in the fullness of time she died- and went straight to hell! Oh yes, she was as surprised as you are, in fact she was so overwhelmed with surprise that she made more hubbub at the gates of Hell than anyone who has gone there. She made so much noise that finally it reached the ears of the Eternal Father who said to one of His angels -What is all that noise about? You'd better go down and see'. So the angel flew down to the gates of Hell and as soon as the woman saw him she began at once to say she had always been very respectable and highly respected and there must be some mistake about her destination. The angel flew back to the Eternal Father- 'It's a woman who has gone to Hell, who thinks she ought not to be there, she thinks there must be some mistake'. 'That is very unlikely' said the Eternal Father and he turned His mind to other things. But the noise went on and on, until finally He said to the angel, 'Just go and see if there really has been some mistake and ask her if she ever did anything kind to anyone'. So the angel flew down to the gates of Hell and again the woman complained that she had always been very respectable and highly respected' But , said the angel 'Did you ever do anything kind to anyone?'. Then she had to think for a long time but finally her face brightened and she said 'Yes-I once gave an onion to a tramp'. The angel flew back to the Eternal Father. 'She says she once gave an onion to a tramp'. 'An onion is always something' said the Eternal Father. Take her onion , hold it out to her and tell her if she holds on to it you will draw her up to Heaven'- You can imagine she held on to it! But when the other inhabitants in Hell saw what was happening they rushed and clung to the woman's skirt and others rushed and clung to them, until, as the angel soared, all the inhabitants of Hell soared up with her! When the woman realised what was happening, she was angry, and cried out 'Let go, Let go, It's my onion'. Alas, when she said 'It's my onion' – the onion broke into a thousand fragments, and they all fell back into Hell. And now it doesn't matter how much noise the woman makes-The Eternal Father doesn't take a bit of notice!