

3<sup>rd</sup> January 2022

## A.B.C.

**“Man is man’s A.B.C. There is none that can  
Read God aright, unless he first spell Man.”**

*Francis Quarles, Hieroglyphics of the Life of Man (1638)*

Francis Quarles was a 17<sup>th</sup> century English religious poet, best remembered for his *Emblemes*, from which yesterday’s “Thought for the Day” quote was taken. Quarles became Chronologer to London at the time of Charles I, and wrote, among other philosophical treatises, *Hieroglyphics of the Life of Man*, which gives us the quotation for today.

Quarles’ assertion relates to the human condition. He was writing in the language of his day, and, therefore, the title of his work and the wording of the quote shouldn’t carry a gender bias for us. The word “man” isn’t used in the sense of the Latin *vir* implying a male subject, but more *homo* relating to the whole of humanity. He is saying, in effect, that before we can understand the nature of God, we must understand humanity. If we are to learn of God, then humanity is our A.B.C. Spell “Man”, and you will be able to go on to “read God aright”.

It’s a powerful and interesting concept which all of us who search for faith and an understanding of the mystery of God would do well to explore. But let me take it to a practical level. When I worked as a hospice chaplain, there were times when what was happening to a patient, a family, or even how it was affecting me, made little sense. A young death; multiple losses; a painful ending to a life; the brokenness of grief. In these times, it was hard to know and understand where God was. It often felt hopeless. So we gave what we had – our humanity: time, listening, tenderness, patience, empathy, touch, waiting, tears, consistency, skill, and a host of human attributes. And remarkably, we had *countless* experiences when these human attributes pointed to, or created, something deeper, mysterious, heavenly, beautiful, transcendent. Is it so remarkable? The human was the A.B.C. The learning was about the nature of God.

Spell “Man” and you can “read God aright”. Wow!

### **A prayer for today**

*Can others see my God through the ABC of my life? I hope so! Amen*