

Views from the Pews: Shadowlands

C S Lewis was one of those fortunate optimists who thoroughly enjoyed his life, as an Oxford don drawing out the unfolding minds of his students. His favourite lunchtime break was spent sitting around a log fire, drinking beer in The Eagle and Child pub with J.R. Tolkien and their friends, swapping mutual criticisms of each others' writings. But he was also deeply convinced that the life on earth he so much enjoyed was still only a shadow of the glory to come, and he coined a term for it: we live in the shadowlands, he said.

Shadows and darkness are not necessarily to be feared, they just disguise the brightness behind them. At night, we cannot see the sun directly, but we are not cut off from it because the moon reflects its powerful beams on to us. And we have the beautiful stars and the planets and the magnetism of the earth to guide us on our journeyings. By day the stars are far outshone by the sun, but we know they are still there, and will appear again after sunset. The stars and the moon reflect God's eternal care for us as we live our short, shadowed human lives. Plus, we have millennia of ancient wisdom from the saints and the peoples who were much more familiar with bright night skies than we are, because they knew how to live in the velvet darkness that, for generation after generation before the invention of electric lighting, always ended every day.

Ordinary daylight shows us our lives on earth in all their human limitations, and our precious environment in all its brokenness. With God's compassionate help we struggle through each day's challenges, and sometimes we are grateful to retreat from them under the cover of the oncoming night. But one day, our struggles will be over, and then, we will emerge from the shadows to see the glory of God and ourselves and our loved ones as we really are, God's beloved, truly redeemed creatures. The full brilliance of a light brighter than we have ever seen, as all the Saints see now, will then show us all the colours of the earth in their dazzling beauty. On All Souls' Day there is comfort for our grief over our lost loved ones in knowing that their death was like emerging from the shadows into a blazing new dawn – and ours will be too.

Kim King