

Matchmaking

Thought for the Day

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Love and marriage have rather dominated the media over the last weekend. Perhaps it's down to our role-models at the Palace, or may be medieval superstition about birds choosing their mates in mid-February, or have some loose connection to a Christian martyr killed by the Emperor Claudius. But be that as it may, as the days lengthen, the winter blues start to turn into pink, and young folks' fancy turns to thoughts of love.

Unfortunately, of course, it isn't that easy for everyone. No work of fiction would be complete without its star-crossed lovers – and we all have a prurient interest in the affairs of so-called celebrities who have nothing substantial to celebrate beyond the tangled details of what used to be called their personal life.

But what is really tragic are the stories of victims of forced marriage, which is no more or less than a form of kidnapping or child abuse, and which thankfully is being outlawed in this country.

On the other hand, there's nothing objectionable about arranged marriage, whether it's arranged by parents or by professional matchmakers, just so long as the partners are acting of their own free will and not under duress.

We kid ourselves if we think lonely-hearts columns or speed-dating are anything different. These are just alternative ways of meeting potential partners with something in common, while keeping the option to walk away.

So against that background, what do we make of the match of the week? The parties are in their 50s and have for much of that time been in clandestine contact, with the tacit knowledge of half the world. Public opinion polls show widely divided views about whether their newly announced match will even go ahead, and if so whether it will succeed.

But by the match of the week I don't mean the one which obsessed the media, but a much quieter affair by the Red Sea, where representatives of Israel and the Palestinians, with their Egyptian and Jordanian matchmakers, sat down of their own free will to explore their future together.

Only time will tell, but while we wait, all of us must bless the warming relationship between Ariel Sharon and Mahmoud Abbas, and pray, as the Bible says, for the peace of Jerusalem.