

## Sermon Sunday 11<sup>th</sup> September 2022 Requiem Mass for Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II

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This is not the Sunday we thought it would be. Not the service, not the sermon, not world that we had before that announcement was made on Thursday afternoon, when we received the news that the great constant of our lives together in these islands had died. The wording of the palace's statement on Thursday was simple, dignified and direct, as befitted its subject: "The Queen died peacefully at Balmoral this afternoon."

It is not that these words were ones we never imagined we would hear. The celebration of Her Majesty's Platinum Jubilee in June was bittersweet as we offered our heartfelt thanks and noted her increasing frailty. Part of the immense impact of the lovely little scene filmed for the Jubilee with Paddington was the sense of an ending. When Elizabeth the Second, by the Grace of God of the United Kingdom of Great Britain & Northern Ireland & of Her other Realms & Territories Queen, Head of the Commonwealth, Defender of the Faith, took tea with a small bear to the delight of her nation, and put in that iconic handbag a marmalade sandwich – for later. And her smile at that "for later" – was knowing and warm and wise. That there was not all that much later left.

So we knew this day would come, but like all things that we understand in our heads nothing can prepare us for how our hearts will respond. For just as the Jubilee was triumph of true celebration across our land and beyond, her death is a cause of deep sorrow and loss. There will never in our lifetimes be anyone like her again. As our new Prime Minister put it the "Queen Elizabeth the Second was the rock on which modern Britain was built." Our rock.

It is her long life of faithful and unstinting service that has been the theme of much of the reflection following her death. We have watched footage of her address to the nation on her 21<sup>st</sup> Birthday when she made this vow: "I declare before you all that my whole life whether it be long or short shall be devoted to your service." An extraordinary promise and one profoundly fulfilled.

Less often have we heard her words before this vow. It is when she explains that a life of service is not one chosen but one since the Battle of Crecy has been literally the motto of the Prince of Wales, the heir to the throne. *Ich Dien*, I serve. Who am I? What am I for? What is the purpose of my life, my power, my crown to come? All questions answered in that one short statement. I serve. Seventy five years after her promise to serve, Her Majesty wrote to her people on the occasion of her Platinum Jubilee a message of characteristic hope and encouragement, which ended like this: "I look forward to continuing to serve you with all my heart, Your Servant Elizabeth R." Our servant.

The character, fortitude and humility of Her Majesty the Queen were beyond question. But for her it was also beyond question whom she looked to day in and day out for that strength, wisdom and courage. A book was published to coincide with her 90<sup>th</sup> birthday with the title *The Servant Queen and the King She Serves*. For the Queen was explicit in her faith in Christ, for her

personal faith within the role of Defender of the Faith. Her life of service was founded upon a life of prayer and the communion of the church. Christ was her rock and her anchor. Her respect for the religious choices of others was exemplary, but for herself she knew whose example of service she followed. Jesus. Jesus, who said to his disciples “I have come among you as one who serves” *Ich dien*.

Today and in the days and weeks to come we shall feel not only sad but deeply unsettled. Unbalanced without the rock-like stability of the world as we have known it. Adrift without our familiar anchor as a nation and people. Lost in our loss, we are truly bereft.

And Her Majesty the Queen’s death comes at a time when she has been one of the few consoling certainties. No need to rehearse the headlines which news of her death replaced, but wherever we look at home and abroad, these are dark and difficult days. The Queen herself could not make the challenges we face go away, but she could offer an unwavering confidence that there was a way through them. In her first televised Christmas broadcast in 1957 she said this:

“I cannot lead you into battle, I do not give you laws or administer justice, but I can do something else. I can give you my heart and my devotion to these old islands and to all the peoples of our brotherhood of nations.”

Her heart, her devotion, her wisdom and her faith, which guided her and comforted us. It was what her father George VI trusted and shared in his Christmas Broadcast of 1939, when Britain was at war and the world in turmoil. Reminding us today that these are not the first dark days for our nation and our world, and they will not be the last.

King George quoted this:

“I said to the man who stood at the Gate of the Year, “Give me a light that I may tread safely into the unknown.” And he replied, “Go out into the darkness, and put your hand into the Hand of God. That shall be to you better than a light, and safer than a known way.”

It was heard by his thirteen year old daughter and she lived her whole life by it. We have seen it in every act of service, duty, care and love that she shared with us. And it is that same hand which reaches out to steady us today. Christ who is the same yesterday, today and forever and yet also the God who makes all things new. Her Majesty the Queen knew whose hand she held. Now she sees her Lord face to face and knows even as she is known. Our Queen and our beloved sister in Christ. May she rest in peace and rise in glory. Amen.