

Queen Elizabeth II – 1926 - 2022

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts be acceptable to the eternal God of the ages whose promise is to dwell with his people forever; King over all principalities, powers, thrones and dominions. Amen.

I don't imagine I am alone in that, although we all knew this day would come and we had been making plans for some time, when the news of Her Majesty's death was announced at 6.30pm on Thursday, 8th September 2022, it hit me like a battering ram.

This majestic lady, a devotee to community and the common life, centre to our national life and bringer together of international communities and culture has been taken from us.

Sometimes people ask why the monarch is Head of the Church of England. I think her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II was all the answer one needed. A devout and loving Christian, devoted to unity and public service who managed somehow to be both committed to her family whilst always serving the public interest.

The loss of Queen Elizabeth II will be deeply felt throughout our nation and the commonwealth.

Living a life of public service, always in the public eye and under public scrutiny, is not easy. No matter how devoted one is to their family, there are regular times when they have to play second fiddle to the demands of the role. To be a servant of the community demands that on regular occasions you have to give up your own wishes and desires in order to serve the common-good.

For the Queen that role was not only intense, it was 24 hours a day, 365 days a year for seventy long years!!! Her commitment to duty and service was remarkable. Her enduring long-term vision transcended the inevitable reactivity of short-term politics. Such is the advantage of our own constitutional democracy; a defence against being blown backward and forth by the prevailing winds of popularism. But even more remarkable was the way in which Queen Elizabeth undertook her role with wisdom, humour, kindness and attention to the real concerns of every person and community with which she spoke. She purveyed a humanness in spite of her sovereignty. It is not surprising that warm tributes have come flooding in from all over the world. It isn't just the UK that has felt this loss.

From Canada, Justin Trudeau was fighting back tears as he said in a televised address to his nation that: "In a complicated world, her steady grace and resolve brought comfort and strength to us all. Canada is in mourning,"

From Australia, Anthony Albanese likewise said 'This is a loss we all feel, for few have known a world without Queen Elizabeth II. In her seven remarkable decades on the throne, Her Majesty was a rare and reassuring constant amidst rapid change,' he said.

'Through the noise and tumult of the years, she embodied and exhibited a timeless decency and an enduring calm.'

And if the words of the Archbishop of Canterbury are to be believed, it is a calm that she carried to her deathbed, dying in hope and expectation that she would now be reunited with the God she had served so faithfully for 96 years.

And, of course, that faith moulded and fashioned her for her entire life. She could not have been the remarkable head of state that she was without her faith. She prayed daily and attended church every week without miss. She knew that the only way for her to remain balanced in such a demanding role was to remain connected to her loving God, and perchance his love might just manifest something of itself through her. In this she was an example to us all. Her faith gave her resolve and resilience, and a gracefulness that only grew with advancing years. She embodied the faith that she proclaimed and inhabited those words of Jesus: "I have come to serve, not to be served" (Matthew 20:28).

What so many in the media miss but her people seem intuitively to grasp, is that her monarchy was not about privilege, it was about vocation. She believed very strongly that she had been chosen to do a role of life-long service. Queen Elizabeth felt that God had called her to be our Queen and she assented with her whole life. In her simple 'yes', Queen Elizabeth showed each of us how to convert privilege into service, no matter what the challenges and criticisms. From the moment she was anointed with holy oil at her coronation Queen Elizabeth understood her role to be one of life-long service under her High Priest and King, Jesus Christ. Her loyalty to him and her people never wavered, and it is thanks to her strong base of Christian calling that Her Majesty will be remembered mostly for her selfless public service and sense of duty.

The changes that society has seen during Queen Elizabeth II's reign are vast and well documented. Changes to technological, political and private life have been both extreme and fast moving. From post-war Britain to 21st Century globalisation. From industrial expansion to environmental concern. But I wonder if the biggest change that society has seen in that time is not technological, economic, environmental or political, but the rampaging individualism that has driven so much of it.

Her Majesty had the most remarkable way of cutting through the noise and the nonsense to see the truth of what was needed. She always seemed able to put common-life and the public interest first whilst so much of the society around her rode a tidal-wave of selfishness and self-interest. It is almost as if we as a nation became reliant upon Queen Elizabeth II holding up a light reminding us of the need for faith, hope, loyalty, service, building of community and striving for unity.

I wonder what will happen to us now that she has gone? I guess we have a choice. We can let the attributes and principles she espoused die with her like some out of fashion niceties from a bygone era – and many in the media are already trying to do that. Or we can commit ourselves again to those chivalrous notions of faith, trust, loyalty, public service and self-sacrifice.

In St John's Gospel Chapter 6, Jesus says "I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty". For the Queen, Church was central to who she was as a person and over many long years she maintained a strict prayer and worshipful life and persevered in faith during good and bad moments. She spoke frequently of how her faith gave her the resolve and fortitude she needed to lead our country in such a fractured world.

As we gather around the Altar in our churches, we share that same gift of God that her Majesty partook of every week for the entirety of her life. That's the beauty of our Christian faith and Jesus' gift of Holy Communion; it unites people of every station and every nation and it bonds them to the eternal promises of the heavenly kingdom. It is to that heavenly kingdom that our beloved Queen has now been called, where I have no doubt she will be rejoicing with the angels at the eternal banquet prepared for all peoples.

May she rest in peace, and rise in glory.

God save the King!

Fr Rob