

Requiem Eucharist for HM Queen Elizabeth II

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

We have come together in this Requiem Eucharist to give thanks for the late Queen's life, to commend her to God's mercy, to pray for the King and the Royal Family, and to reflect on the Christian faith that inspired and sustained the Queen right to the end of her earthly life.

The extraordinary thing, of course, is that Queen Elizabeth was never meant to be Queen at all. Her father, King George VI, came to the throne in the nineteen thirties under the most difficult of circumstances, and became by the grace and choice of God precisely the King that our nation sorely needed in the dark days of the War. Queen Elizabeth in turn, from her earliest days had a profound sense of God's call on her life, revealed in that remarkable speech to the Empire on her twenty-first birthday. That sense of calling and of being chosen by God was made visible to the world in her coronation service, at the heart of which was the act of prayer and anointing for the sacred task that was entrusted to her on that day.

As so many have commented in recent days, The Queen lived out this sense of being chosen by God in a life of dedicated service, from great state occasions, to dealing with endless red boxes full of government papers, to her interaction with individuals on visits to every corner of the globe. She embodied dignity and integrity in every aspect of her life, continuing with extraordinary dedication right to the end, fulfilling her constitutional responsibilities with grace and charm when receiving the outgoing and incoming Prime Ministers just two days before her death.

My own impression is that Queen Elizabeth revealed in her life, perhaps especially in more recent years, precisely what Saint Paul talks about in our reading from 2 Corinthians. Paul says, "Even though our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed day by day." So while we saw Her Majesty becoming more frail in body, and sometimes therefore stepping back from public events (and why not at the age of 96!), nevertheless we also saw in her both a tremendous sense of fun (who will ever forget tea with Paddington Bear!) and a growing open-ness about the faith which inspired her, and from which she hoped others might also draw strength and comfort for themselves.

I had the privilege of meeting the Queen just once, back in July when I made homage to her as the new Bishop of Rochester. She was so engaged, so well

informed, and so deeply interested in the future of the Diocese of Rochester and of the Church of England. Her body may have been becoming more frail but her mind and her spirit were full of life, of faith and of hope.

Right now of course, the Royal Family and we as a nation are facing the sadness of her passing and the grief this brings. The words of Lamentations do not shirk the reality of grief, but at the same time, they offer assurance and hope: “Although he causes grief, he will have compassion according to the abundance of his steadfast love; for he does not willingly afflict or grieve anyone.”

The sadness and the loneliness of grief were epitomised in the image of the Queen sitting alone at the funeral of her beloved husband, Prince Philip. With what dignity and courage she faced that moment, and how much she must have drawn on her reserves of faith and trust in God to sustain her through that time.

As we mourn the Queen’s passing, and pray for the King and all the members of the Royal Family, may we remember above all the faith which inspired her, and which was the source of her inner strength, her dedication and her compassion. Jesus said, “I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.” It is Jesus the bread of life who can support us through grief, who can meet the deepest needs of our souls, and who can sustain us for the journey that lies ahead, as individuals and as citizens of our nation. In the midst of all the turmoil around us – and goodness me Queen Elizabeth saw a good deal of that over the years – it is Jesus Christ and the hope that we have in him that are our strength and our stay, whatever life may bring.

Returning as I close to the words of Saint Paul in Corinthians: “For this slight momentary affliction is preparing us for an eternal weight of glory beyond all measure... so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life.”

For Queen Elizabeth, that momentary affliction is now past; she has inherited the eternal weight of glory beyond all measure, and for her the mortal has been swallowed up by life eternal.

As we entrust her to the everlasting mercy and love of God, may we in turn embrace and hold fast the faith that guided her and the hope that sustained her, to the glory and praise of God. Amen.

Bishop Jonathan Gibbs
Bishop of Rochester

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