

SERMON given at the Requiem for HM Queen Elizabeth II at Resurrection, 18 September 2022,
By Father Swain, the Superior-General of the Guild.

In the Name . . .

One of our children, 9 years old, was sitting at home watching a documentary with her parents last weekend and sat there intently. It featured a lot of film footage of the Queen, much of it not weighty state occasions, but more private and amusing moments. When it ended, she burst into tears. Her father asked, "what's the matter?" She said, "She was such a nice lady!" She asked me last Sunday after Mass where the Queen would be buried. I said that Kings and Queens were buried in castles, and the one she would be in is 1000 years old. She thought for a minute and asked a question I had not been expecting: "Will she be lonely?" I said no, her parents are next to her, and her sister and her husband. She looked up at her father and said, "Like Grandma..."

There has been a great deal said about the Queen in over seventy years, and a great deal this last ten days. Some of it is interesting and percipient or informative, but a great deal has been ignorant, often wilfully so, foolish, or even aggressively nasty. I have cancelled my subscription to The New York Times. I do not use social media myself, but I gather there it is even worse. Every ignorant fool, crazy person or general hater has come out of the woodwork, which seems to be the way of the world now.

From an historical and political perspective, there is no shortage of serious commentary from those actually knowledgeable enough to give it, and without prejudice. There have also been some lovely tributes and moments when the events taking place were simply allowed to speak for themselves: the thousands gathering in every place associated with her life to leave flowers, an honour guard of tractors in farm-land in Scotland which her hearse passed by, in many places people rode to the side of the route on their horses – an obvious tribute. A surprising number herded their farm animals with them to watch her pass by, knowing her affection for cows and sheep. In London, hundreds of taxi cab drivers lined the Mall leading to the palace, forgoing fares, with blinking headlamps in her honour in a spontaneous demonstration, the vast numbers in London to see the procession pass with her body to Westminster Hall. In Edinburgh at St Giles', and now in London, enormous number of people have waited day and night in the streets just to file by her coffin in Westminster Hall to pay tribute. The queue goes across the bridge to Lambeth; it has been 24 hours a day since Wednesday. The first night, almost the entire shift of bobbies came off duty at midnight and came together. Tomorrow's State Funeral will be a great public occasion of grief, followed by the much lower-key burial at St George's Chapel, Windsor Castle, when she and Prince Philip will be laid to rest aside King George VI and Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother and Princess Margaret, in the side chapel created after the King's death. I have seen it several times: It is small, unpretentious, but utterly peaceful, elegant and suitable to those who rest there awaiting Our Lord's coming again in glory.

I do not propose to add anything to the considerations which are so prevalent now, not the positive historical or political ones, and certainly not any others. I should like, instead, to go back to what our little girl said.

The tributes to any sovereign of 70 years, an astonishing reign, would be many and real. But we must not forget nor take for granted the fact of the devotion and duty of the Queen, and the returned devotion and love of her people, and indeed people around the world. Some of us here were subjects of the Queen, all of us belong to a church of which she was the titular head, but many in the world without any conceivable connection grieve her loss.

And yet, if you think back, this is far from having always been the case. People were terrified of the Tudors, the Stuarts were wildly controversial before, during and after the Civil War one even being beheaded, and from 1714 to 1760 the Hanoverians came to reign whilst remaining Kings of Hanover, and were despised as being useless German foreigners uninterested in their new realm and unable even to speak its language. George I and George II were extremely distasteful men, it has to be said. George III was a deeply virtuous man and a good king, despite common imagination, but his struggles with mental health clouded the latter years of his extremely long reign, and forces completely beyond his control ended in the loss of thirteen of the North American colonies. The reign of George IV and to only a slightly lesser extent his brother William IV were times of great dissatisfaction with the Kings and the whole Royal Family who, it must be said, deserved every bit of the criticism for prodigal spending, scandalous personal lives, and complete disregard of any obligation of duty. When George IV died in 1830, *The Times* said, "Was ever any man so little mourned?" When people questioned the Iron Duke of Wellington about this young girl Queen Victoria coming to the throne at 18, and whether she could cope, he said, "Good God, she can be no worse!"

It has been the character and the devotion of the Royal Family and their own behaviour since Queen Victoria and the Prince Consort, and continuing through to the sterling examples of the Queen's grandparents, King George V and the redoubtable Queen Mary, to whom she was particularly close, and of course her own splendid parents King George VI and the Queen Mother, who were venerated by his millions of subjects throughout the world. And then there has been the Queen.

For seventy years, she has shown us who she was, never in a flashy way, never talking about herself, her thoughts, or heaven forbid, her feelings. Her generation did not do that, and I know that as my parents were of her generation and had also been in the War. Instead, her actions spoke louder than her words. From the time she came of age at 18 in 1944 and the slender girlish figure in uniform was captured by newsreels putting a jeep back together whilst her parents watched, to her death seventy-eight years later when she appointed her fifteenth prime minister, and even considered travelling to London to do so from Balmoral, just two days before her death, she placed her duty before all else. That is not something most people do anymore. She was honest, trustworthy, decent, honourable, a woman clearly devoted to her family, to the countries over which she reigns, very much to the wider Commonwealth which is amongst her greatest legacies for she essentially created what it is now, a multi-racial, multi-faith, community of friends, with a common heritage of good things like a shared language, a shared concept of common law, and parliamentary government. Her life was also one of sacrifice: who would have wanted that life? Constantly in the public eye, suffering withering criticism which she could never

answer, and from which she and her family could never defend themselves. When an earlier Princess of Wales was killed in a sudden car accident and left two teenage sons, the Queen became a grandmother, doing above all what was best for her grandchildren, which both of them have acknowledged gratefully ever since. What did she receive for her efforts?

Being constrained as to where she lived and how, and a year filled 363 days a year with duties, with two days off of Christmas and Easter, visits near and far, and talking to and meeting people of all kinds, everywhere. Which of us works 363 days a year at full bore, and has done so for seventy years to age 96? And for altruistic causes, for those in need, for the betterment of society, and simply to be there, as the personification at first of their country, but increasingly the personification of virtues which many feared were disappearing. None of these things directly benefitted her. She could easily have abdicated in her seventies, as many European sovereigns have done: in the Netherlands, Belgium, Spain, Luxembourg and so on. She never even considered it; she was a sovereign anointed by God, called to be in this position and to do good things with it, and whilst she was alive, she meant to go on.

Millions of feet of film show her at the Coronation, at Jubilees, at great and important events, with the astonishing number of world leaders she met and knew. There is less time given to her quiet visits, for which she insisted there be no fanfare of any kind: to the coal slide disaster at Aberfan in Wales in 1965, as soon as it was declared safe, returning five times to visit the survivors and bereaved, to the airplane crash site in Lockerbie, Dumfriesshire, in Scotland, the scene of a mass shooting in Dunblane in Perthshire, the London underground and bus terrorist attacks of 7 July 2015, to the survivors and families of the dead in Manchester after a mass shooting at a concert, and to those who had survived the dreadful high-rise fire in London at the Grenfell Tower. No heralds came before, no trumpets sounded, she just appeared in the streets, in hospital rooms, in churches and at cemeteries. Why was she there? She didn't have to be – why did George V and George VI visit their troops in war? Why did Queen Mary and the Queen Mother visit hospitals? Why did the King and Queen visit bomb sites in the war? She did it because it was the right, Christian thing to do. Like many an older lady active in the Anglican Church, she picked up her handbag, put on her hat and coat, and went out to do good where she could, because it was the right thing to do, she had been brought up to do that, and had lived her life that way.

Many years ago, the Queen Mother took her granddaughter, to visit a hospital. A typical teenager, she complained that she was bored and tired and didn't like hospitals. The Queen Mother said, "We are members of the British Royal Family. We are never bored or tired, and we LOVE hospitals..." Today, that teenager is the Princess Royal, at 72, amongst the most hardworking members of the Royal Family, and along with her eldest brother and her father, were so, supporting the Queen, for many, many years. She, like her mother, learnt her lesson.

When a microscopic virus changed our lives and filled us with fear and concern for ourselves and our suddenly changed society, presidents and prime ministers had lots to say of little value, many lied, dissembled, gave mixed messages and comforted no one. No one trusted them, and many still don't. The one person in the world who had something to say of value, and that in a message of less than fifteen minutes, was the Queen. What she said was perfect, comforting, sensible,

consoling, it made everyone feel everything was going to be alright. She was 94 already, but her life had taught her those things, and her love and wisdom were obvious. The whole world watched that message. Very few paid any attention to Boris Johnson or Donald Trump, or could remember anything they said, and she had been Queen for 68 years already, and would remain so after both politicians were out of office.

But we must not imagine she was averse to change. It is widely conceded and admired that the Palace, the Royal Family, the Royal Collection Trust, and organisations like the Duke of Edinburgh's Award Scheme, the Prince's Trust, and the Duchy of Lancaster, are amongst the most diverse ethnically, made up of men and women of all faiths and backgrounds, sexual orientation and finances, who find equal opportunity, far more so than with the Government itself. They actively recruit people around the Commonwealth by a scheme which pays for applicants to come to London or Windsor for two years, apprentice in their chosen area, and then return home with valuable experience for the restaurant or hotel businesses. That one item on their CVs of course opens almost any door. This was the Queen's idea. And this attitude was not new in her family. When the Royal Family visited South Africa in 1947, the local officials explained to the King that when white children came and presented bouquets, it was appropriate that they should have a word with them, but that when black children did, they should say nothing. The King sat there politely and listened, and when they finished, he stood up and said one word: "No". For the rest of the visit, they spoke to everyone equally.

The Queen did not stand for "old times", she stood for something else: quiet dignity, selflessness, commitment to duty, love of her country and her fellow man, a constant instinct for service which was integral to her being, innate modesty, and those terribly old-fashioned sounding words: honour and virtue. To all of us who live in a world where that is rare, who see little of it around them, and, honestly, find it more difficult to live a life like that than we should, she was a constant reminder, whether as a glamorous, stunningly beautiful young woman of 25 with a wildly handsome husband and two attractive little children, or as a grandmotherly figure with her adored husband and ever-growing band of grandchildren and great-grandchildren, appearing all over in her signature hats, white gloves and beautifully turned out clothes which themselves cheered people up immensely, everyone knew she was there to be seen, to do good, to help. She was not perfect, no one is. But I believe, absolutely, that the reason so many people mourn her so greatly today is, to a large degree, because she so faithfully showed us those very virtues which we so fear are largely disappearing, and to the detriment of our society. But, and I must say this, for I hate to end on a note of desperation or fear: there stood with her, and stand now, her eldest son, the new King Charles III, and his son the Prince of Wales. They are very recognisably from the same mould, and they have made it plain that they mean to carry on her work as she saw it. They are not the same, they are men, of course, and one is of the next generation, the other of the generation after that. Things will change a bit, and it is right that they should. But the King and Queen and Prince and Princess of Wales have had her as their teacher and their example, they have said this repeatedly, and they mean now to do what she wished them to carry on doing. Nothing could reflect better on her than that.

The Queen should always have the last word. This is the close of her Christmas broadcast in 2000, and it could, and does, sum up her whole life.

“To many of us our beliefs are of fundamental importance. For me the teachings of Christ and my own personal accountability before God provide a framework in which I try to lead my life. I, like so many of you, have drawn great comfort in difficult times from Christ's words and example.

I believe that the Christian message, in the words of a familiar blessing, remains profoundly important to us all:

"Go forth into the world in peace,
be of good courage,
hold fast that which is good,
render to no man evil for evil,
strengthen the faint-hearted,
support the weak,
help the afflicted,
honour all men."

It is a simple message of compassion... and yet as powerful as ever today, two thousand years after Christ's birth."

And perhaps most poignantly, from 1957:

“In the old days the monarch led his soldiers on the battlefield and his leadership at all times was close and personal.

Today things are very different. 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...”.

She did.