

Sunday 5 June 2022

Civic Service for the Platinum Jubilee of Her Majesty the Queen

Proverbs 8: 1 – 16, Luke 22: 24 – 30

After the Archbishop of York's sermon on Friday I feel I should be talking about horse racing. But I want to begin more locally!

I visited one of our Woburn Sands residential homes last Wednesday to take a service, and asked the residents what royal occasions they could remember. One lady said that she remembered standing in a London street near a shop window on the day of George VI's coronation – the Father of our current Queen. That was in 1937! But most people in our country don't remember a time when Queen Elizabeth II was not our monarch. Whether or not we are ardent supporters of royalty, the Queen has been a constant quiet presence in the background of our lives.

She is one of very few monarchs to have reached a Platinum Jubilee. She is respected and admired

across the globe despite the fact that, as our constitutional monarchy is arranged, her actual power is very limited indeed. I've been thinking this week about what it is that is so special about her.

Our first reading today, from the Book of Proverbs, was all about wisdom. We're not often privileged to know what the Queen is saying. Although we do at least now know what she keeps in her handbag. She has never given an interview. We certainly don't know what wise words she may have had for the fourteen Prime Ministers she has known during her reign. It is clear that she is scrupulously careful not to overstep the boundaries of her role. Sometimes, however, there is just a hint of what she might wish to convey. Small details can be significant, as when she entertained President Trudeau soon after the invasion of Ukraine. You may have seen the photograph of the very tasteful green, yellow and blue flowers between them with the Queen's dress in blue and green - just hinting at the colours of the Ukrainian flag.

“For wisdom is better than jewels” we heard in our reading. Wisdom is also related to prudence, and involves knowledge and discretion. Wisdom’s words are ‘righteous’ and ‘straight’. For me, the Queen exemplifies a quiet wisdom gained over many years’ experience and reflection. It’s the wisdom of restraint - often expressed in what she does not say.

The second quality about our Queen which I find remarkable is her unstinting commitment to service. As she famously promised on her 21st birthday to the nation and the Commonwealth, “I declare before you all that my whole life, whether it be long or short, shall be devoted to your service.” On her Accession Day speech in February this year she said “I look forward to continuing to serve you with all my heart.” And she signed herself Your servant, Elizabeth R.

To those on the outside her life may appear to be one glamorous and exciting event after another. But as our Councillors will know public engagements can be very tiring.

Our second reading, from the Gospel of Luke, reminds us of the one on whom she models herself as servant leader. Jesus, who said, “The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them; and those in authority over them are called benefactors. But not so with you; rather the greatest among you must become like the youngest, and the leader like one who serves.” Her position is one of great privilege, and considerable wealth, but there is nothing at all self-serving about the way in which she carries out her role.

The third quality I find remarkable is her perseverance. It would be entirely reasonable for her to step down completely from public duties. But she clearly has no thought of retirement. She has indeed committed her whole life.

For me, the most striking of her qualities, and the one which underpins all the others, is her deep Christian faith. For 70 years she has undertaken her role as Queen, Head of the Commonwealth, and Supreme Governor of the Church of England with amazing diligence, great grace, astute

intelligence, deep humility, and tremendous effectiveness. Where does all that come from - the clarity of vision, the stamina, the steadfastness in duty and care?

In her Christmas addresses the Queen often talks about her faith in Christ and the difference He has made to her life. In 2020 she said 'The teachings of Christ have served as my inner light'. She also sees Christ as someone who 'lived by what he believed and gave us the strength to do the same.' (1981). And she consciously models her own leadership on Christ's pattern of service. In her 2012 Christmas message she said, 'This is the time of year when we remember that God sent his only son 'to serve, not to be served'. He restored love and service to the centre of our lives in the person of Jesus Christ.' For her, service and love are bound together. And selflessness is a key quality.

She is also often remarkably frank about herself. In 2002 she said this: "I know just how much I rely on my faith to guide me through the good times and the bad. Each day is a new beginning.

I know that the only way to live my life is to try to do what is right, to take the long view, to give of my best in all that the day brings, and to put my trust in God!"

A Platinum Jubilee is not just a time for looking backwards. Looking forwards - May we follow her Majesty's example of wisdom, service, perseverance and faith whatever we are called to do in life. Let us continue to pray for Her Majesty the Queen, and long may she reign over us.

Amen

Revd Diana Young