

A homily at the Service of Commemoration of the Queen Elizabeth II in Helsinki Cathedral on Friday 16th September 2022.

“The whole life is a journey to God. In its course are many lesser journeys taken for many different purposes. Sometimes the Bible records special journeys undertaken for special purposes in answer to call from God... Such will be my journey to Westminster. It will be undertaken in obedience to a call from God”.¹

These words were written by Archbishop Fisher of Canterbury in his book “*For the Queen. A Little Book of Private Devotions*”. It was written to help the young Queen prepare for the day of her Coronation on 2nd June 1953. It included a prayer and meditation for each day, starting on 1st May and finishing on the evening of the Coronation Day, 2nd June 1953.

The late Queen Elizabeth did not expect to be a monarch, it was a duty which found her quite unexpectedly. There were no campaigns, no job offers but a call to undertake a special journey. We do not know if the late Queen ever read the *Little Book*, of which only less than twenty copies were ever made, or if she remembered its words. But it seems evident that she understood her calling to be a calling from God to serve amid the changes and chances of this world.

We have gathered here today to commemorate her long service and give thanks for all that she was. The whole setting of today’s service underlines her remarkable life. We gather far away from the United Kingdom or any Commonwealth country. The service is taking place in a Lutheran Cathedral, thanks to the agreement between the Lutheran Church in Finland and the Church of England. My understanding is that the late Queen was thrilled to have witnessed Christian unity as expressed in the Porvoo Agreement.

Many here present have no direct connections with the United Kingdom or the Commonwealth. Also gathered here are those to whom the Queen was the Head of State, the Supreme Governor of the Church of England and protector of the Church of Scotland. We are all united with a sense of loss and an understanding that an era has come to an end.

It was the Queen’s personality and devotion to her role, appreciated by so many, which enabled her to rise high above any political question or geopolitical debate. We saw her meeting and visiting world leaders and making connections which would otherwise have been very difficult. Many Finns remember with warmth her visit to Finland in May 1976. Each time I hear someone recalling their meeting with the Queen they have all shared how at ease she made them feel in her company. Many of the official tributes, including those of former Prime Ministers, tell how behind the ceremonies and symbols was a friendly person who took the effort to make people feel comfortable around her.

And it is this dedication to serve which brings us to today’s Bible passage (2 Cor 4.16-5.4). This passage might not be the easiest to read but the message is rather simple. It is not the wealth, or glamour, or position which earns us respect and credit in the eyes of others and of God; It is what we are in our hearts. In the end, we are all called to treat others with respect, kindness and grace. This is even more important to remember today when some are using the language and deeds of violence and oppression in their attempt to gain authority and respect.

Real power, like that of the Queen, comes with service to others, acknowledging and appreciating the efforts of individuals and communities in building better societies, and supporting the brave men and women of our time in fulfilling their duty. These are virtues which we should all try to emulate.

In August, just couple of weeks ago, the Queen wrote to the archbishops and bishops of the worldwide Anglican communion, saying:

“As we all emerge from the pandemic, I know that the Conference is taking place at a time of great need for the love of God – both in word and deed... Throughout my life, the message and teachings of Christ have been my guide and in them I find hope. It is my heartfelt prayer that you will continue to be sustained by your faith in times of trial and encouraged by hope at times of despair.”ⁱⁱ

This seems a perfect legacy to us all; to continue to build a better world, guided by hope and supported by faith. And, as the Bible passage reminds us, what really matters is who you are as a person.

On Monday the Queen will enter Westminster Abbey once more. She will then be laid to rest in the Royal Vault in St George’s Chapel in Windsor, together with her beloved husband Prince Philip. The final words of the *Little Book* for the evening of her Coronation Day, written by Archbishop Fisher as if by the Monarch herself, were a prayer of commitment to God:

“Lord, this day thou hast been gracious unto thy servant. Thou hast filled my cup with thy goodness to overflowing. With a humble spirit and a thankful heart, I commit myself to thy care and will lay me down in peace and take my rest. Amen”

ⁱ Our Faithful Queen. 70 Years of Faith and Service. HOPE Together © 2022

ⁱⁱ [This is a time of ‘great need for the love of God’ – Queen’s message to Lambeth Conference – The Lambeth Conference](#)