

Thought for the Day by Archbishop John McDowell

Friday, 9 September 2022

When anyone dies it's usual for whoever is going to speak at the funeral to ask the family what they would wish to have said about the person who they loved. Although I am not a blood relation of the Queen any more than you are, that's not how it felt for me or for millions of others when we heard about her death yesterday evening.

So, what can I say about her Late Majesty Queen Elizabeth on my behalf and on your behalf? How could someone whose great wealth and privilege, which in theory should have made her so distant from ordinary people like you and me, feel so close to us in life and in death?

In part I think it was because she so obviously cared for people and respected them. From the moment of her father's death she made her commitment to her vocation as Queen crystal clear. And she carried the burden of that great responsibility for over seventy years, and it fell from her shoulders only in death. That is all the more remarkable because she was not born to be a Queen and in her childhood she did not expect to be. And perhaps that too helped to bridge the gap between her experience and ours – feeling that she would have to make her own way in the world with all its uncertainty in the gathering storm of the 1930s and in the weary war years.

So the quality of her sympathy and understanding was ground out between the millstones of life's difficulties and sorrows, not least the death of her "liegeman of life and limb", Prince Philip. And she had experienced the tragedy of Northern Ireland close up: so she was a peacemaker.

Duty may seem like a dusty old word, but for Queen Elizabeth it meant paying what was due – due to her people and to her God; and clearly what she felt was due to both was the tribute of her whole self and her whole life. The depth and loveliness of her faith and the cheerfulness of her personality were never "on parade", but they were never in any doubt either. She did not hoard her life to herself but opened her hands and let the richness of her character and experience fall from them.

Perhaps I'm biased, but I'm pretty sure that she was able to carry out what must have been very often a dull daily routine for so long because she was convinced that it all came together to serve a nobler purpose. Four hundred years ago there was a soldier who tried to explain to his heartbroken young wife why he had to go to war. And he said: "I could not love you half so well, loved I not honour more".

"I could not love you half so well, loved I not honour more". And honour, the quality of knowing and doing what is morally right, must have been at the very core of the Queen's life and motivation.

So, with you I give thanks to God for the life of Queen Elizabeth for her faithfulness to Him and to her calling, from which we have gained so much; and thankfulness for all her love and friendship in her marriage to her people.

GOD SAVE THE KING