

Sermon on Trinity 14 (the day before the State Funeral of HM The Queen Elizabeth 2nd): 19th September, 2022.

Epistle Reading: 1 Timothy 2.1-7

Gospel Reading: Matthew 22.16-22

It isn't a secret, because I have known nearly all my life, where the Bank of England makes our pound notes – just the next town to Loughton in Essex where I grew up – a place called Debden, near Epping Forest.

Everyone will be searching to keep, or perhaps find, their hidden supplies of today's paper currency before new notes are printed! I have only ever known the head and seal of our late, beloved Queen, in my wallet. Here on the **other** side of my £5 note, the head of Winston Churchill, on my £10 note, Jane Austen and on my £20 note, JMW Turner, the artist who said "Light is therefore colour". (As a poor priest in the Church of England, I can't remember much about a £50 note, except that it is the biggest in size!).

The irony of today's choice of Gospel reading is that (and I quote from a thoughtful Roman Catholic writer): "The relationship between God and the Queen was not one-sided. She relied on her Maker, but she clearly felt that he should rely on her, too, speaking up for her faith."

In all these past days of mourning, and queuing, solemn ceremonial and rich tradition, there has also been silent reflection and deep prayer. "Supplications, prayers, intercessions and thanksgivings should be made for

everyone”, urges St Paul, “so that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and dignity.” I think of the solitary figure of the Queen in St George’s Chapel at Windsor at the funeral of her beloved husband, wearing black and wearing a mask. But I also think of her recent Christmas broadcasts in which she spoke about the rock and foundation of our common faith, rooted in Christ – and how much that was for her a source of inspiration and guidance, wisdom and compassion, as it is to us all, so constantly and faithfully.

Her Majesty got it so right – the power and canopy of prayer and not just in times of trial or sorrow. She also got it so right about the politicians or so-called ‘emperors’ of our own age, the ones on the flip side, who govern us; she listened to them, and counselled them in complete confidence; they shared one another’s hopes as well as burdens, not least how to manage change, be that personal as well as public; she knew the sacrifices so often needed to be a sign of reconciliation and unity when they failed, even if it meant shaking hands with a known terrorist or dictator under the scrutiny and watchful gaze of so many cameras. She sought our unity and peace most of all.

Perhaps, as she was not permitted to speak aloud her personal thoughts or conversations, her personal prayer life became more open and transparent, I do not know. I certainly like to think that she could speak to God, totally unafraid, because she so trusted in the reliance of His responsive love. I certainly like to think also, that whenever any of us take time out to find some private spaces to pray,

God is there to join us, attend to us, and be our guide. And how lovely it is to see so many people use this church daily to sit or kneel in prayer, or light a candle.

Light is colour, which is why if we gather in vigil at Elmhurst Park tonight, words will fade away, effortlessly. Or which is why:

Silent prayers of supplication here, before Our Lady, or before the Blessed Sacrament, are just as strong and meaningful; how much we desire to pray matters even more than where or when we pray. In a moment of personal memory & gratitude... I pay tribute to my Dad who, from an early age, gave me everyday books on prayer I still remember – William Barclay and the imaginative Fr Michel Quoist, someone who, incidentally, wrote a prayer about a £5 note (you can 'google' it)! Nothing and no-one was 'off limits' because the simplest and inclusive of prayers can often be so honest and so true. I think, too, of Brother Roger of Taize, how his prayer inspired and encouraged me and how indeed the music of Taize continues to reach out to young, and not so young people today, as well as to so many different nationalities and cultures...

Prayer mattered to the Queen and it matters to us, in all its variety. So let's now be still for a few minutes, in thanksgiving for that gift, and then we will listen to 'A Simple Song' from Leonard Bernstein's 'Mass' which Romy has kindly chosen to play on flute. And let us all remember, cherish, those words

from 'Hamlet' which King Charles articulated and prayed so tenderly, in public, for his mother:

"May flights of angels sing thee to thy rest." AMEN.