

'An eternal weight of glory' – A Homily for Trinity XIII

Lamentations 3.22-26, 31-33

Psalms 121

2 Corinthians 4.16 - 5.4

John 6.35-40

Early Thursday evening as Ellie, Alice and I watched the BBC's announcement that Her Majesty the Queen had died, a strange silence descended upon the room. It felt as if the world had changed, and perhaps it had. Few of us can remember a time before Elizabeth sat upon the throne – a still, sure point in an ever-changing world – someone whose own unobtrusive faith sustained us through moments of joy and celebration, but also in times of personal and national crisis. Over the last few years in what seemed like a world gone mad, I would take ten minutes or so out of the Christmas chaos to sit and listen to her gentle words of wisdom, words of hope and faith coming from a woman who was perhaps small in stature, but who carried the weight and dignity of the monarchy.

Neither was our Queen someone who was out of touch with our modern world, steeped in tradition as she was. As a young woman she was adamant that the coronation should be televised, making the most of new technologies to convey the deepest mysteries of the crown. And I must admit, seeing Her Majesty parachuting out of a helicopter with James Bond and sharing a little secret about a certain marmalade sandwich with Paddington Bear, was also pretty wonderful.

It was the Danish theologian and poet, Soren Kierkegaard, who argued that human beings are a synthesis of the temporal and the eternal, but that in forgetting the latter, we risk losing an authentic understanding of who we are. In our modern society we have never been more 'temporal' as we constantly tap on our iPhones and Google Pixels, endlessly scrolling through Facebook, YouTube and Instagram. We have never been so short of time as we anxiously look to the next experience, the next relationship, the next identity. We are liquid beings, pouring ourselves into temporary moulds, easily dissolvable, a fiery constellation of stars, burning brightly and then gone.

As our Monarch, Queen Elizabeth could embody another way of being, somehow drawing the temporal and the eternal closer together. She has been an expression of something handed-down for generations, whose very symbols speak of wisdom, dignity, justice. She has also been an embodiment of our nation, even as our divisions seem to grow ever wider, hinting at the possibilities of another kind of togetherness, one not based in rivalry or competition, but in goodness and truth.

At first her death seemed to threaten all of this, but as I thought about it, death seemed to become another symbol that draws together the temporal and the eternal for us as human beings, something that sharpens our sense of how fragile and ephemeral our lives are, but that also plunges us into the deepest of mysteries, something unfathomable, unthinkable, something eternal perhaps.

Like many of you, I was fearful that when Her Majesty the Queen died, that all of this sense of meaning and stability would simply fall apart and that it would become just another catastrophe, as British culture and the Church of England lost the final thread that was holding them together. But after hearing King Charles III speak so beautifully about his mother's love and care and her sense of duty, humility and service, and his pledge to take this forward in the best way he could, it felt like the golden thread of succession was doing its thing, and that society could go on, that eternity had not been lost.

Our Christian tradition, of course, warns us against putting our trust in kings and princes, and reminds us time and again of the failure of kings to be the instruments of justice and the signs of God's reign that they are meant to represent. This is because, just like everyone of us, the royals are fallible, human beings capable of great and wonderful things, and pretty shabby things too. This is why kingship had to be re-imagined as it moved from the Gentile world into the life of Israel. No 'god-kings' invested with the power of the divine, rather a fallible sign of something else, a kingdom yet to come, of a God brimming with love, compassion and joy.

Saint Paul has some important words for us today, words of hope that take us beyond this moment into something greater than ourselves, lifting us from the chaos and fragmentation of the temporal into the deep mystery of the eternal, an eternity that holds

all things in being:

‘So we do not lose heart. Even though our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed day by day. For this slight momentary affliction is preparing us for an eternal weight of glory beyond all measure, because we look not at what can be seen but at what cannot be seen; for what can be seen is temporary, but what cannot be seen is eternal.’

It is into this eternal weight of glory that we entrust our Queen today. AMEN.