

Archbishop Anne’s Reflection for The Service of Thanksgiving for the late Queen Elizabeth II

At St. Luke’s Cathedral, Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario

October 2nd, 2022

“Send her victorious, happy and glorious, long to reign over us, God save the Queen.” For seventy years during the reign of Queen Elizabeth II these words were sung by commoners and royalty in schools and churches, football stadiums, concerts and in the halls of government to honour our gracious and beloved Queen, Elizabeth II.

This evening, as we gather for this service of thanksgiving for her late Majesty we rejoice that these words rang true in her life. In good times and bad, in times of war and times of peace, we have all borne witness to our happy, glorious Queen and her exemplary commitment to her duties. The kindness, concern and care that she demonstrated in the 70 years she served so faithfully made her someone we not only loved but actually looked up to for reassurance and guidance.

While most of us knew that the chances of us ever meeting Queen Elizabeth in person were rare, we felt as if a conversation in our home with her over tea and a marmalade sandwich would be so easy. Because, after all, she has been in our homes through the gift of radio, television and technology. In the last few weeks many Algomites shared stories of occasions when they had caught a glimpse of Queen Elizabeth – some even got to shake her hand.

Throughout most of our lives the Queen was a constant, taking her place at holidays and memorials, royal births and weddings, and at thousands and thousands public functions or her special charity events, working right up to her death. When other world leaders appeared in the limelight and then vanished from sight, Queen Elizabeth remained a stable and stabilizing force. The image of her greeting the newest Prime Minister of England just two days before her death has become iconic. And just a few days before that she took the time to send her condolences to the people of James Smith Cree Nation in Saskatchewan following the horrendous acts of violence in that community.

This year we were thrilled to see the Queen celebrate her platinum jubilee making her the longest serving British monarch in history.

All over Algoma trees have been planted in celebration of this milestone anniversary, and this treebilee will continue in the coming years as we continue to grow the Green Canopy around the diocese. This coming Tuesday, following the noon day Eucharist at the Cathedral an Ivory Lilac Tree will be dedicated in our garden at Bishophurst, marking Queen Elizabeth’s Jubilee and thankfulness for her life.

In response to Queen Elizabeth’s faithful dedicated service there was always a huge outpouring of love, honour and respect for her in her long life which has borne so much good fruit. Following her death we witnessed that same outpouring of love as people lined up for hours…days to walk past her coffin in Westminster Hall.

Named at birth, Elizabeth II, by the Grace of God of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and of her other realms and territories Queen, Head of the Commonwealth, Defender of the Faith and Sovereign of the Noble Order of the Garter.

Of all the titles given to the late Queen the one I love the most is the epithet given to her soon after her death by The Rev. Dr. Lee Gatiss the Director of the Anglican Church Society – *Elizabeth the Faithful.* These words capture so perfectly her praiseworthy devotion to serving her people as their queen to the very end of her life. She was true to the vow she made to her people.

We can all hear her childlike voice ringing out these words, “*I declare before you all that my whole life whether it be long or short shall be devoted to your service and the service of our great imperial family to which we all belong.”*

On September 19th just before Queen Elizabeth’s coffin was lowered into the ground there was a poignant and a powerful moment as symbols of her authority and power were returned. The sceptre symbol of royal power and governance, the Orb symbol of the sovereign’s power coming from God, and the Crown were handed back to the Dean of Windsor be given to King Charles III on the day of his coronation. Left the world as she entered it as Elizabeth Alexandra Mary, the name given to her at her baptism.

It was in that moment that she was marked with the sign of the cross and sealed as Christ’s own forever – the very same sign with which we ourselves are marked.

At her baptism God made a commitment to love her, forgive her, to walk with her wherever life’s journey might take her, to give her his Holy Spirit to guide you in her Christian living, to give her eternal life.
God’s commitment to her and to us is absolute and total.

I believe that Queen Elizabeth knew of God’s commitment to her. Throughout her life she was true to the vow she made to God and she had a very strong sense of her identity as ‘Christ’s own forever’ which was most evident in how she lived out her vocation as Queen in her faith.

People close to Elizabeth II suggest that for her, faith went far beyond protocol and duty but that it guided everything about her life. The Queen’s commitment to her role, her ability to undertake all she did was because she never tried to do it in her own strength.

The Queen’s ability to trust in God fully in good times and bad were part of her life. “*I know just how much I rely on my own faith to guide me through the good times and the bad”*, she once said, “*each new 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*.” It was this simple and uncomplicated faith that gave her the confidence to face the future with courage and hope. To move from fear to faith.

How did this happen?

The Queen was formed by Common worship, public and private prayer and the study of Scriptures. Like so many of us she was nurtured in her faith by elders – in her case her grandfather George VI who would sing hymns to her at bedtime. She committed to memory many of the words of hymns and the psalms. Not surprising that Praise My Soul the King of Heaven and Christ is Made the Sure Foundation were some of her favourites sung on many royal occasions.

The Queen belonged to a parish church. Kenneth MacKenzie who served as the Chaplain of the chapel at Balmoral for 15 years said he could only think of two occasions apart from Covid times that she did not attend Sunday services.

While Elizabeth II believed that the church in England and the Commonwealth had a duty to protect the free practice of all faiths, over the years she became bolder in speaking more freely about her own. “*Christ’s example has taught me to seek and respect and value all people of whatever faith, or none*,” she said in one Christmas message.

“*Ultimately, monarchy points beyond itself to God*,” wrote Ian Bradley a professor of divinity at St. Andrew’s University, “*deriving its true authority from above, rather than below*.” Queen Elizabeth was such a monarch, who looked to the Good Shepherd of this evening’s second reading in her daily life. She also helped point us beyond ourselves and the disasters that were happening all around us to God, and to God’s vision for the healing and wholeness of the world. During the coronavirus pandemic she addressed the Commonwealth with words of great hope – helping us to see a new time –“*We should take comfort that while we may have more still to endure, better days will return. We will be with our friends again. We will be with our families again. We will meet again.”*

So it was really no surprise when the passage from Revelation (21: 1-7) that we just heard read this evening was also used at her funeral service. John’s vision of a new heaven and a new earth. God’s final act consists of a new creation. The defeat of the forces of evil does not bring about the annihilation of the earth but rather leads to God saying, “I will make all things new.” God’s future includes the resurrection of the dead but does not stop there. When death is vanquished creation itself is made new.

God’s future is pictured as a city with a garden at its centre. This is the place where all things are reconciled. The gates of the city stand open at all times so that people from every corner of the world can enter into the presence of God. In this city the rivers that give life flow freely. Here the tree of life has leaves to heal the nations of the world. Here the radiant presence of God illuminates the city, needing no artificial light. This is the future that calls people everywhere. It is a magnificent vision of healing and hope.

Those who are gripped by such a vision ask themselves how such scenes of life may shape a way of life now. To live in anticipation of the New Jerusalem is to embrace its way of life and to bear witness, as Queen Elizabeth did, and to bear witness to the purposes of God, whose work as the author of creation and new is ultimately life and life abundant.

May we as fellow citizens of heaven on earth also catch a glimpse of that vision of new creation and embody it in our own lives as we bring heaven a little closer to earth.

 So now we honour Queen Elizabeth’s memory, we follow her example, we pray that she knows the joys of life eternal. And we pray for our new king, Charles III that his reign will, like his mother’s be happy and glorious. God save the King.

+Anne: Algoma