

## *Homily for a Requiem for HM Queen Elizabeth II*

St Philip's Anglican Church, O'Connor

Eucharist, 15 September 2022

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*We wish not to be unclothed but to be further clothed, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life.* From this morning's reading from the second letter to the Corinthians.

Much has been said about the extraordinary life of the Queen, it seems her every move and word has been recorded for posterity. But perhaps the most important moment of her life was not recorded. There is no record on film of her anointing and vesting during the Coronation service in June 1953; this most sacred part of the rite of Coronation was not recorded. The Coronation is often described in sacramental terms, it has been described as the eighth sacrament, this is central to our understanding of the Queen's ministry.

Away from the cameras, the Queen first put on the newly-made *Colobium Sindonis*—a loose linen-lawn garment, similar to an alb and she was then anointed with Holy Oil. She was then vested in a robe of cloth of gold called the Dalmatic or Supertunica, the vestment worn by deacons. This vestment is symbolic of service, the Diaconate being the first order of sacred ministry, the order of Service. (Which is what the Greek word *διακονία* means). Back in the glare of the cameras, the stole was then placed around her neck in the manner of the priesthood. It is over these garments that the royal robes and regalia and finally the crown were placed. Underneath the robes of state, those of temporal power and authority, the Queen was clothed in the robes of sacred service and sacrifice, the vestments of humility.

When the crown was placed on her head, the Archbishop of Canterbury prayed that she may obtain the crown of an everlasting kingdom. It is this that we celebrate and commemorate today, as we do whenever we gather for a funeral, a memorial or requiem. This kingdom is something that we glimpse here on earth; that we endeavour, in our own way, to bring about through faithful service and sacrifice. Our human endeavours are flawed, yes, but they are valid when they point to something beyond us, when they are sacramental. This is what we strive to do, to point way from us to the God who is our creator, who recreates us—in Christ and goes on remaking us in the Spirit, as Paul reminded us this morning.

King Charles spoke at his accession of the inheritance that is now his. This is important, just as our own Christian inheritance is important—that which we have received. But what is equally important is our tradition—with a capital T. The difference between the two is subtle, but crucial. The future of monarchy depends upon this understanding as does the future of the Church. We inherit from the past, it is handed on to us; it is then beholden upon us to make that inheritance live for us today, for our generation, that we might pass it on, renewed, this is the living Tradition of the Church.

I believe that we find this distinction in the rite of Coronation and in the traditions of the vesting of the monarch. The Crown is inherited; this is both a physical thing and an institution. But underneath lies a vesture of humility. The inheritance of the Crown, if it is to 'live', must be carried lightly with humility with a willingness to allow it to be open to the life-giving Spirit; the same applies to the Church.

The Monarch is the Defender of the Faith, Supreme Head of the Church of England—an Episcopal Church—and is represented at the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland—a Presbyterian Church—by the Lord High Commissioner, who attends as an observer and is appointed by the Sovereign. Indeed, members of the Royal Family have acted as Lord High

Commissioners. The Monarch is also the Head of Commonwealth—a diverse collection of nations with differing ethnicities, cultures, languages, and religions.

The Commonwealth Day service held annually in Westminster Abbey provides an opportunity for the Christian faith to be set in the context of a wide variety of religious traditions and cultures. There have been occasions when some Christians have complained to the Queen that such a service is inconsistent with her role and with the words of Jesus ‘No one comes to the Father except by me.’ But perhaps this service offers a chance to see heritage and Tradition function together. From the Jewish heritage we learn of God’s faithfulness, from Muslim heritage of his sovereignty and mercy, from the wonders of the natural world a realisation of God’s mystery and power. All this calls on us to reflect on that which we inherited and how we might make our own faith Tradition live.

As Christians, we speak of something more intimate: of a living God and his fatherhood, for only in Jesus can we begin to experience the truth of God as Father. It is to this God we commend the Queen, who like us is a child of that heavenly Father. This was the faith she espoused and served, symbolically enacted at her investiture when, as Paul would have it, under the mortal crown which is inherited was the clothing of the immortal sacred; it was a faith she lived out in humbly in service and sacrifice. We pray that that same God and Father will gather her to himself where she may receive the crown of everlasting life. Amen.