

HRH The Prince Philip, the Duke of Edinburgh

Only a week since the funeral of Prince Philip, I thought it is worthy of comment, even though we don't look to the monarchy as does the Church of England. Of course, I'm unable to produce a photo with copyright issues, but there are plenty on the web.

I have never considered myself a royalist, although never anti-royalist, but my understanding of their role grew tremendously while Chaplain to my friend who served the Queen as High Sheriff of Greater Manchester for a year. I experienced first-hand how a role like that, one of being present to represent the Queen at various functions and charities, is appreciated and helps boost both the morale and fundraising capabilities of charities.

In a way, I reflected, it's not much different to how Ministers are still perceived by some in the Church, as a figurehead, something many Ministers find quite difficult. We are only human, serving in the way God has called us, part of a whole. Yet Ministers being at Church events and visiting says something to the value of the effort put in by the people running events and the value in God's eyes of those visited. On a much larger scale and internationally with the Commonwealth, that is what our monarchy does: gives people value by making the connections.

Prince Philip worked tirelessly to do that. On reading more about him on his death than I've ever done before - in fact, I've never done before - I encountered someone who valued the people he met, despite his gaffs, who was personable, who saw himself as a refugee having had a traumatic period in his growing up years, who was faithful in service to his Queen, country and the Commonwealth, and was faithful to God. I hadn't realised he'd not only been baptised in the Orthodox tradition, but had a keen interest in theology.

At the funeral, the commentators flagged the event up as being symbolic for the nation, that as we saw the Royal family grieve, the Queen sitting on her own, we could sense that they shared the grief of all of us who have lost loved ones during this last year. It was poignant that even with the military pomp on the way in, everything else was as any other funeral in terms of numbers allowed to attend and social distancing, the Queen sitting alone. There was no singing, although the size of the place allowed for distanced choir singing and music in another area of the Chapel. Maybe we can relate to it, and share those moments of grief.

For us as Christians, we see how the Royal family came into the presence of God to say their goodbyes and seek comfort in their grief. The commentator, Huw Edwards said at the end that the Prince now rests in peace in the royal vault below St George's Chapel, "having fought the fight, having finished the race and having kept the faith." We can think of the Church funerals we've had over this pandemic, as well as other funerals attended, and how it is so important to know God is with us and comforts us. At my Church in Leeds a couple lost their disabled adult son. He wanted a humanist funeral, which I was privileged to attend. But at the end, there was a prayer, which the parents had requested. It was so good just to make that connection with our ever-present Lord.

One other thing from Prince Philip's funeral I'd like to comment on was something I heard said, possibly by the commentator. I can't seem to find it again. It was something like, 'This is the moment Prince Philip becomes just a Christian soul before God.' In the Committal, the Dean of St George's Chapel, Windsor referred to Prince Philip as "O Christian soul".

Whatever it was that I heard, that phrase reminds us that we are all equal before God as we pass from this world, and indeed equal before God in this world. Some of us may have better jobs, earn more money, or be famous, and some of us may struggle to make ends meet, have no qualifications, and be overlooked. But whatever we may be called to be in this world, in God's eyes, we are all of value, and all created equally. To my thinking, that gives us all the incentive to treat everyone else equally, to value all as precious creations of God, and to seek justice for all.

Those familiar words of Micah 6.8 say: 'He has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.'

As God required of HRH The Prince Philip, the Duke of Edinburgh, so God requires it of us.

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