



Memorial service for His Late Royal Highness The Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh, at

Eucharist for the Second Sunday of Easter: Service of Remembrance and Thanksgiving for His Late Royal Highness Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh

[As delivered]

Acts 4:32-35, John 20:19-end

Come Holy Spirit, fill our hearts with hope and delight in your resurrection. Amen.

For the Royal family, as for every other, no words can reach into the depth of sorrow that goes with bereavement. It is not simply a factor of age, or familiarity. It is not obliterated by the reality of a very long life remarkably led. Nor is the predictability of death's arrival a softening of the blow.

Loss is loss. For each person it is felt individually and reaches into the heart variously. We cannot ever know how others feel, nor do two people feel the same. It is simply loss. Some bear it apparently easily, for others it is crushing. We cannot judge anything from that, either about the depth of affection that existed or the reality of grief that is experienced. We cannot judge, we must not say we know, we can only pray and affirm.

Yet it is in walking with Jesus Christ that there is light rather than darkness. It is often a seemingly fitful light for those caught up in sorrow, but it shines, and it grows and it brightens and it beckons, and calls us to hope rather than despair. The hope is not based on vain myths and legends but on the reality of the resurrection. In Christ we see that in death we are but separated for a while, borrowed but for an instant, and it is in faith that we find the light is not an illusion but is the deepest and most reliable of realities.

For it is who God creates, God who calls and God who sends. For His Royal Highness The Duke of Edinburgh there was a willingness, a remarkable willingness, to take the hand he was dealt in life and straightforwardly to follow its call, to search its meaning, to go out and on as sent, to enquire and think, to trust and to pray.

In these last two chapters of John's Gospel, Jesus appears, he breathes the Holy Spirit and he gives authority that can only come from God: the authority to forgive and to withhold forgiveness. This new creation, which is the resurrection and all that follows, changes everything.

It is this new creation that has in it restoration of the face of God to spiritual eyes, and that brings spiritual sight to eyes that cannot see spiritually. The disciples see - do you notice in the Gospel reading, that word keeps coming, the disciples 'see'. Thomas demands sight, and consequently they all believe.

We, all of us today, are called to believe without physical sight and so find that the reality of Christ in our lives is, as Jesus promised, a blessing in times of darkness and grief, when physical sight is taken from our eyes of the one we loved.

It is this new creation that breathes life and peace. Life and peace do not always seem to travel together, yet they are here together in the words of Jesus.

It is this new creation that sets a new pattern of meaning for the world: one that includes forgiveness, inspires creativity, generates energy and makes for a new pattern of life, in which order and the meeting of each person's need are to become normal, as we heard in the reading from

the Acts of the Apostles.

That community of Acts chapter 4 is the Holy Spirit-filled development of the Israel of the Exodus. But it is more than that: for this is a community without limits, without boundaries, and it reveals God to the whole world - as they would have said then, the world of the gentiles as well. A God of open arms and infinite holiness.

It is this new creation that inspires, and where we find lives that have prophetic aspects of foreseeing and practical applications of inspiring, as with Prince Philip, we see signs of this new creation - of the Spirit of God.

We should not exaggerate. The Duke would have been the first to harrumph strongly at over-spiritualisation of the world he found, let alone of himself. The figures of the resurrection are fallible and normal. In our reading the disciples rejoice because until then they had NOT believed. Thomas is pragmatic and down to earth, cynical even, from the first chapter of John's Gospel till this one. In the Acts, the idyllic community of Acts 4 turns out to have within it those who grumble and cheat.

The reality of our life in this world is of old and new together - of strengths and weaknesses. We should not become hyper-spiritual or idealistic.

But when death comes we bear each other up, as did those first Christians. We trust the risen Christ as did the disciples, because all has changed with the new creation.

When death comes there is another sort of change: there is deep loss and profound sorrow, but there is neither eternal separation nor darkness forever. There is instead surprise and joy as in John, and all needs met as foreseen in the Acts, and rest and new creation as foreshadowed in Christ himself. Our lives are not completed before death, but their eternity is prepared.

So we can indeed pray that The Duke of Edinburgh may rest in peace and rise in glory. We may pray for comfort. We may pray and offer love for all those who find that a great life leaves a very great gap - for the Royal family and the millions who have themselves suffered loss. We can know that the presence of Christ will bring peace, and the light of Christ will shine strongly, and it is in that light that we can strengthen one another with eternal hope.

5 min read

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