

Reflection for Sunday 18th September

When I began my holiday last week I, like everyone else, was expecting the announcement of the new Prime Minister. I listened to that in a motorway service station car park on the M6 on the way to the gorgeous Lake District National Park. I thought, well that's that then and looked forward to a break away from the TV and the news as well as the daily round. But with a news alert on my mobile last Thursday that changed, and the words of Jesus took on a particular poignancy: "*So stay awake, because you do not know either the day or the hour.*"¹ I appreciate that given the Queen's age her death was anticipated and we all knew that it would come sooner rather than later, but it came quite suddenly and taking place in the same week as the installation of a new Prime Minister has given the nation quite a jolt. I think it is also important to consider that we are still coming to terms with all that happened during the pandemic and its consequences as well as how to respond to the appalling and incomprehensible invasion of Ukraine. Both these are major contributors to the worldwide economic difficulties, which risks affecting the poorest around the world much more severely than those who are more fortunate. Those in positions of leadership both here and abroad need our prayers.

Many have paid tribute to the Queen and I can only agree with those who have highlighted her sense of duty and service and many virtues. Queen Elizabeth II embodied the best of the institution of the Monarchy and her leadership was rooted in her Christian faith, supported by the Duke of Edinburgh and the rest of her family, in particular King Charles III. In the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus talks about leadership with service following the request of the mother of Zebedee's sons to sit at the right and left hand of Jesus in heaven: "*When the other ten heard this they were indignant with the two brothers. But Jesus called them to him and said, 'You know that among the pagans the rulers lord it over them, and their great men make their authority felt. This is not to happen among you. No; anyone who wants to be great among you must be your servant, and anyone who wants to be first among you must be your slave, just as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.'*"² The Queen also embodied this model of Christian leadership with service in the circumstances in which she found herself and thereby acted as a model of Christian leadership for the rest of us in our own circumstances. In response many have turned out to pay their respects to her and it is very moving to see those doing so across the country and filing past her coffin in Westminster Hall. As Christians we offer her our prayers; as we did in her life and now do so in her death.

I would like to thank Fr Alan Sharpe for celebrating a requiem Mass for the Queen last Sunday and Elizabeth Stratford and the Cathedral choir for singing Faure's Requiem. This coming Sunday afternoon there will be an ecumenical service at St. Nicholas' Church which Bishop Richard will attend, the details are in the Newsletter. There will be Mass this Monday morning at 9am, the day of the Queen's funeral, it will be a simple Mass for the Dead offered for her intentions. In the Cathedral we have a prayer focus on the front of the Sanctuary and there is a book of condolence for people to leave their thoughts and prayers. The Bishops Conference of England and Wales have produced a prayer card to help us to pray for the Queen and the new King – please take one, there are plenty. If you have not done so already it is worth looking at the tributes on the Bishop's conference website as an aid to your prayer and reflection. May she rest in peace and rise in glory.

God bless you, Canon David.

¹ Matthew 25: 13. A reference to our own death as well as the coming of Jesus at the end of time.

² Matthew 20: 24 - 28