

St Nicholas Parish Church, Prestwick

The Thought for the Week

Sunday 18th April 2021

I wonder if there is any institution in our society (apart from the Church) which has been subjected to more sustained and savage criticism than the Monarchy?

Once upon a time it may have occupied a position of reverence and authority. Not anymore. It is ridiculed by satirists, debunked by journalists, and dismissed as irrelevant by millions.

And this past week, since the passing of His Royal Highness, Prince Philip, the Duke of Edinburgh, it has all come to the surface once more.

There is a very vocal element within our shores who proclaim that the Monarchy is a very costly anachronism, and that we could get on very well without this family who seem to live in the lap of luxury whilst millions struggle to make ends meet.

We have all heard the school of thought which insists that it is derogatory to one's personal dignity and standing to acknowledge that one owes respect or obedience to anyone at all. We are all equal – the cry goes – and it demeans us to allow that anyone can be in any respect our superior.

That, for me, is a most mistaken philosophy and if generally accepted, it could destroy all that makes life worth living. Our human nature is such that unless we can look up to someone or something better than ourselves, something greater than ourselves, we rapidly become debased.

Her Majesty the Queen personifies our country and, in looking up to the Queen we admit that our country, our fellow men and women, has a claim on us which overrides purely selfish interests. And how much easier it is to look up to a Sovereign than to a dictator, or even a President, or Chairman, or Chancellor.

When we compare ourselves with many other countries in the world today, we should surely realise how fortunate that we have a Head of State who is above the hurly burly of politics, who is not moved by the crass ambitions which cause many in public life to seek and cling on to power, and who quietly and consistently holds fast to the highest standards of conduct and good taste in a world where those standards are often ignored or derided.

For 69 years, our Queen has never put a foot wrong. She has been Britain's most potent ambassador, the envy of many other countries around the globe. When you consider the list of despotic rulers who have littered history these past years, the many megalomaniac politicians who have soured our national life during her reign, it is of little wonder that there are millions round the world who revere her.

Yes, she has had to endure her own immense sorrows and sadness and family problems, yet still, on the eve of her 95th birthday, continues to work a forty-hour week!

And as for the cost of maintaining this historic institution, well, in 2018, the figure was £67 million – in other words, it cost each of us in the UK the princely sum of just over £1.24!

I, for one, think that it excellent value for money when you think of all the colour and historic pageantry and ceremony of royal occasions, inspiring and ennobling us.

There is no question at all that Her Majesty acknowledges her deep Christian faith, a faith of which she has spoken on recent Christmas Day broadcasts, a faith to which she has witnessed consistently, winsomely and publicly all during her reign.

For our Queen, her position has been divinely ordained. She is there to serve. Her position does not mean enjoyment of the pleasures of power, special privileges, or a luxurious style of living. It means rather the constant subordination of her own inclinations and wishes to what she sees to be her duty.

Our Queen knows well the meaning of our Lord's words to His disciples, "Among you, whoever wants to be great, must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first, must be willing to be the servant of all."

It means a readiness, whatever she may be feeling, to meet with cheerful alacrity, all the demands which are put upon her; it means that, in large measure, for almost seventy years she has had to sacrifice her private life so that she may promote the public good, and as she herself has stated, her husband, Prince Philip, has been her "strength and stay".

How great her grief must be; how sad to lose the one who has been there for her, supporting her, loving her each step of the way, making her laugh, lifting her spirits.

Her faith, her family, her commitment, her sense of humour and our prayerful support will all be so important to her in the lonely days and times of readjustment that lie ahead.

One of the many stories which she enjoys telling is of the occasion of a Garden Party at Buckingham Palace, and as she was chatting to a young woman amongst the many guests, the young lady's mobile phone rang.

Quick as a flash, and to save the young woman any embarrassment, the Queen said, "You had better answer that. It might be someone important!"

And I still laugh at the story of a Royal Variety Performance at the London Palladium, when Her Majesty and Prince Philip were meeting all the stars at the end of the performance, amongst whom was the inimitable fez wearing comedian, Tommy Cooper.

As Her Majesty was introduced to him and shook his hand, he asked her if she would be happy to answer a question.

"Yes," replied the Queen, "but I may not be able to give you a full answer."

"Does Her Majesty like football?" asked the comedian.

"Well, to be honest, not really," replied Her Majesty.

"In that case, do you mind if I have your Cup Final Tickets for next Saturday?"

Queen Elizabeth II, during her long life, has been a woman who has looked in two directions – upwards towards God and outwards towards her people.

A few years ago, she said,

"I know how much I rely on my Christian faith to guide me through the good times and the bad. Each 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 to what each day brings, and to put my trust in God. I draw my strength from the message of hope that our Lord Jesus Christ brings in His Gospel."

It is my prayer that that message of hope will comfort and sustain her in her profound grief and, that, despite harsh criticism and cruel invective that come to her from several quarters, may she continue to carry with good health and a glad heart the heavy burden which has been laid upon her.

The Revd Fraser R Aitken, Locum Minister