

Death of HM Queen Elizabeth II: Service of Prayer and Reflection, St Paul's Cathedral, London
Sermon by The Bishop of London, The Rt Revd and Rt Hon Dame Sarah Mullally DBE

A life lived in the service of others is a rare jewel. It is a jewel that Her Late Majesty The Queen wore as a crown.

Today, we gather together in this Cathedral Church, with those across our nation, the Commonwealth and the world, with a profound sadness as we mourn the death of Her Majesty The Queen. In doing so, we mark and celebrate a life of extraordinary dedication to others.

During her coronation at Westminster Abbey almost 70 years ago, the young Queen was anointed before God. With sesame and olive oil containing orange flowers, roses, jasmine, cinnamon and musk, her life was set apart for the service of others. This act of anointing was so sacred that she was hidden from view and covered by a golden canopy: a rare moment of privacy in a life to be lived in full view of millions.

Her Majesty's sense of vocation and calling was not something she could pick up and put down again, it was deeply embedded in her understanding of herself. In the spirit of our reading from Paul's letter to the Romans, she did not live to herself, nor has she died to herself.

Most of us have not known life without The Queen. When she acceded to the throne, the world and the country were both very different places. For seven decades, Her Majesty remained a remarkable constant in the lives of millions: a symbol of unity, strength, forbearance and resilience. She has been this nation's unerring heartbeat through times of progress, joy and celebration, as well as in much darker and more difficult seasons.

In a message released on Accession Day, she wrote: 'In this special year, as I dedicate myself anew to your service, I hope we will all be reminded of the power of togetherness and

the convening strength of family, friendship and good neighbourliness'. As we mourn her loss, give thanks for her life, and reorientate ourselves as individuals and a nation to life without Her Majesty, may her words remind us of the power and the strength to be found in our coming together.

All of us are grieving the loss of our Head of State, Head of the Commonwealth and Supreme Governor of the Church of England. But the Royal Family are grieving the loss of a mother, a grandmother, a great-grandmother.

How we learn to live with the death of a loved one differs for each of us, but we must all find a way to grieve. As the theologian Tom Wright said, 'Not to grieve, not to lament, is to slam the door on the same place in the innermost heart from which love itself comes'. We may not know the power of that love until the moment of loss, for as the writer Khalil Gibran wisely observed: 'Love knows not its own depth until the hour of separation'.

When we are bereaved, we need to make opportunities, individually and together, to face and absorb the depth of our loss. Yet we are also invited into the healing love of God which never falters, and which is the deepest and widest perspective of our lives. It is a perspective beautifully expressed by the writer of Deuteronomy who tells us that 'underneath are the everlasting arms'. Even in the midst of our grief we are enfolded in that all-encompassing love.

As a Christian I believe that death is not the end. That gives me hope even in the worst of times. To speak of hope is not to deny the fear, the loss and the anguish which death brings. Jesus himself stood with Martha and Mary at the tomb of his beloved friend, Lazarus, and wept, wholly undone by his grief. But in that cameo we have the assurance of God's presence in the world's pain and a model for our response to human suffering: God is there for us and we are called to be there for others. The words of the prophet Isaiah assure us that the Spirit of the Lord is at work and will bind up the broken-hearted, comfort those who mourn - and give them a garland instead of ashes, and the oil of gladness instead of mourning.

Her Majesty had a remarkable Christian faith, about which she had increasingly spoken in recent years, referring to Jesus Christ as her anchor and role model. Here in this Cathedral Church on the 3rd of June, we joined to celebrate her Platinum Jubilee. The Archbishop of York spoke of her faith in Jesus Christ as a fountain and a well from which she drew deeply, and by which she was replenished through all the challenges and joys of her life

If Christ was her anchor, her husband, the late Prince Philip was, in her own words, Her Majesty's 'strength and stay'. Yet even in the depths of her own mourning we saw once again her courage and her instinct for putting the needs of others first.

At her Coronation all those years ago, at the age of twenty-seven, she walked up the aisle of Westminster Abbey straight past the throne and knelt at the high altar in silent prayer. She gave her allegiance to God before anyone gave their allegiance to Her. The depth, breadth and generosity of Her Majesty's self-giving in service was an extraordinary gift. I am certain it has gladdened God's heart.

No words can encompass how much we owe Her Late Majesty The Queen. She will be profoundly and greatly missed. My prayers are with the Royal Family at this time, that they may know in the midst of their loss that 'underneath are the everlasting arms'.

And in the words of Simeon, when after a long life lived in faithfulness he met with God incarnate: 'Lord, now lettest thou Thy servant depart in peace, according to Thy word'.