

Address for memorial Eucharist for HRH Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh

Benefice

April 18th 2021

Readings:

Wisdom 3:1-3

Romans 8:31-end

John 11:20-27

With long life will I satisfy him and show him my salvation. Ps 91:16

+In Nomine

We've learned so much about HRH Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh since his death just over a week ago. Today we have the opportunity to celebrate his life as both a faith community in the Benefice of Grimshoe and as a village community here in Feltwell in this County of Norfolk – a county which he loved and where he lived 'gently' throughout much of his retirement from public duties.

His was indeed a life well lived and for all the controversies that swirled around him over the years, he did not deviate from his sense of duty to and love and support of his wife and Sovereign, Queen Elizabeth and to the Nation and Commonwealth. He often urged others to 'get on with it' and he practiced this himself without fuss and with generally more than a touch of humour to leaven the most routine engagement: *This building is a little more open now than it was*, being perhaps just one comment which lightened the dullness of unveiling yet another plaque. His wit and smile put many nervous people at ease over years of public life.

There was much more however to the Duke's achievements than turning up at a myriad of routine Royal appointments, both here in the UK and world wide, alongside Her Majesty or on her behalf. Indeed as one journalist put it last week, "It spoke volumes for Philip's character that it took the leaving of this life for his achievements to become public". During his lifetime, so many in the press focussed on his "gaffes", comments, often forthright which served to present him as tactless or cantankerous. Personally, I never minded his forthrightness and I confess I often burst out laughing at some of his more 'outrageous' offerings because I think I knew instinctively that this was a man of far greater substance than one who just put his foot in it – he was, as his youngest son pointed out, more often than not saying what other people thought but didn't dare say! He belonged to that rapidly decreasing generation where 'woke' still meant 'not being asleep'!

He was a highly intelligent individual whose interests ranged widely across many spectrums. He wrote and spoke about all sorts of significant issues, from conservation of endangered species well before it became as urgent as it is today, to science, technology, faith and the arts. The lovely William Loveday setting of Psalm 104 which he commissioned speaks of his commitment to both the latter. Along with the former Dean of Windsor Robin Woods the Duke was at the forefront of establishing and continually supporting the St George's House, Windsor project. This project continues to provide a context *where people from right across society who are in a position to make a difference might gather together to grapple with issues pertinent to our contemporary world. The House thrives on debate, discussion and dialogue as a way of nurturing wisdom which can be put to use in the wider world.* St George's House offers a space for people to stop and reflect on difficult matters, quite often those relating to Faith and Ethics as well as offering clergy the opportunity to refresh theologically and pragmatically their personal development in ministry.

An all round sportsman, he loved the outdoors: sailing, polo, cricket and field sports such as shooting – again widely controversial - though less so in Norfolk where country people understand the link between conservation of the countryside and sport. He spoke of conservation in practical terms commenting that “even conservationists drive cars occasionally...compromises have to be reached.” This, to me, highlighted his common sense and realism. He demonstrated his passionate commitment to biodiversity and sustainability whilst continuing to seek constructive solutions to the serious threats facing our planet. At Sandringham and Windsor he revelled in the often hazardous sport of cross country carriage driving, taking the sport to new heights. I suspect that the presence of his carriage at his funeral procession at Windsor yesterday, drawn by his two beautiful, much loved fell ponies, with his cap, gloves, rug and treats for the ponies lying in his otherwise empty driving seat would have brought a tear to many an eye.

One of his wisest pieces of advice to his children and to the wider community was this: *It's a big mistake to think about yourself. No one is interested in you in the long run. Don't court popularity. It doesn't last. Remember that the attention comes because of the position you are privileged to hold, not because of who you are. If you think it's all about you, you'll never be happy.* He knew that there were far more important aspects to life than 'self'. It reminds me of John the Baptist's words in St John's Gospel [Jn 3:30]. When pointing to Jesus, John said: *May He increase and I decrease.* We saw Prince Philip's commitment to those words in spades

yesterday...everything at his funeral service pointed towards giving praise and glory to God and away from self. Prince Philip's Christian Faith was firmly grounded in Jesus' command: *Do to others as you would have them do to you.* [Lk 6:31] In his long marriage to Her Majesty the Queen, Prince Philip valued and practiced the virtues of tolerance [which he rated as *the* necessary ingredient of a happy marriage], respect, integrity, duty and dignity. His life was a blessing to the Queen, his family and countless people worldwide.

Prince Philip lived for others, carrying out an often punishing schedule of public duties well into old age, supporting his beloved wife as *her liege man of life, limb and of earthly worship* or in Her Majesty's own words as her *strength and stay*. That unwavering commitment to public duty could not have been easy, especially in his supporting role – it must have been quite challenging for a man with such clear leadership qualities not to be 'first violin'! To sustain that level of commitment over so many years took great strength of character and was underpinned by a deep but unfussy Faith which had at its core praise of and thanksgiving to the God he loved and worshipped.

And so today as we remember the life and work of this remarkable individual, we see clearly how Prince Philip's Christian faith underpinned and shaped his character. He cared passionately about conservation because the diversity and complexity of our planet is God's creation which we are tasked to nurture and sustain not plunder for our own gain. The reading from the book of Ecclesiasticus which Prince Philip chose as the first reading at his funeral service extolls the beauty, grandeur and power of God's creation and concluded with these words: *We could say more but could never say enough; let the final word be: "He is the all." Where can we find the strength to praise Him? For He is greater than all his works.* [Eccles/Sirach 43:27-28]

We think today also of Her Majesty. After the tragedy of 9/11, she ended her condolences to the American people with these words: *Grief is the price we pay for love.* Her grief at losing her husband of 73 years is profound and we offer our heart felt prayers for her.

The soul of this 'righteous man' is now in the hand of God – nothing can separate him from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord, who *is* the Resurrection and the Life. We can imagine our Lord smiling on him and welcoming him into life eternal with these words: *Come Philip, beloved of my Father and take for your heritage the kingdom prepared for you since the foundation of the world.*

So we pray in the words of the Russian Kontakian of the Departed, sung at yesterday's funeral:

Give rest, O Christ, to thy servant with thy Saints: where sorrow and pain are no more; neither sighing, but life everlasting.

Music following the address: John Rutter **The Lord bless you and keep you.** Cambridge singers.