

REFLECTION

The Archbishop of Canterbury

The last twelve months have accustomed us to loss in a new way. In about 150,000 cases we have seen people who have died sooner than we would have expected because of Covid. It's an extraordinary number and it's easy to forget that as well as that there have been many others who have come to the end of their lives, and there are many who at this time are looking back over the last twelve months and thinking, 'I do miss so-and-so'. We have become accustomed to grief and sorrow. We know what it is to grieve and to miss people. To have that sense of bereavement and emptiness. And so, as we come to this service, we each bring a piece of ourselves. We'll have our own losses in our own minds; friends, relatives, even those most intimately close to us. But there's something really special about the death of someone as significant, as well known, as familiar as Prince Philip. Prince Philip was someone who had the gift of moral imagination. He did not see the world just as it was, but he saw what could be, and what should be. Immediately many of us will be thinking of others we knew, who on a less planetary stage, in their own community, with their own family, were similar to that. A sort of 'divine discontent', with accepting what was less than what it should be. He worked it out in his commitment to climate change, to interfaith relations, to young people in the commonwealth.

He lived through the transformation of empire, to partnership, the framing of a new global identity. And with Her Majesty the Queen, he was at the very centre of that, just think on that for a minute. From peoples who were ruled, to peoples who became partners. From struggles for independence, to reconciled friendship. He set such a powerful example with such grace, and such courage. He was about innovation, possibility, potential. He was very well known in the world of design, of engineering, and he used his convening power with enormous confidence. To get people together to begin to resolve problems, or to set up organisations that would themselves resolve problems. And that's part of what he leaves for us; that sense that his work carries on. Because he didn't concentrate it on himself. It wasn't 'me, me, me'. It was about the world, about those he served, and in doing that his own role was more and more significant. He had a righteous impatience. He would not accept the status quo. If things were not right, he would say so and say so quickly, and clearly, and often bluntly.

Prince Philip, also though, had a deep and genuine sense of service and humility. Humility isn't about cowering behind things, and refusing ever to say what you think. Humility is having the confidence to do what is right, without thinking it's all about you. And one only had to watch him in a room or at a garden party, engaging with people, to see that it wasn't all about him. But he certainly knew who he was, and he knew the talents he had and what he could bring, and he brought them one hundred percent, at full throttle, right through his life. His service was a profound expression of his own faith. He knew exactly who he was, and his faith was central to who he was and how he lived his life; how he worked out his call to follow Christ in the conflicts and challenges of his own unique calling, and his deep sense of duty.

That faith is the foundation for a sure and certain hope, for this service is not just a 'looking back', it's not even looking around and comforting and seeking to encourage one another and praying for the Royal Family in their grief. It is looking forward in hope.

We come six days after Easter Day, where God, in Jesus Christ rose from the dead and offers life to every human being that will take it. Not a life that crushes our individuality, a life that brings a fruitfulness, a purpose, a calling, a sense of fun, a sense of humour, that we saw supremely in the Duke of Edinburgh.

And so, we can give thanks, but not without hope, and we can be hopeful, but not feel that things have been lost, and we can comfort, knowing that comfort coming from Christ himself who promised that those who grieve and mourn will be comforted. That comfort is for all eternity.

Amen.