

Prince Philip

Thank you for joining us for this service of thanksgiving for the life of His Royal Highness Prince Philip, the Duke of Edinburgh, much beloved husband, father, grandfather and great grandfather. And beloved son of God.

We pray today for Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth 2 who is a sincerely religious woman, who has frequently asked the people of the commonwealth to pray for her in her service. All of us around the world have been holding her in prayer since the news broke of Prince Philip's death. We know that she is feeling the nearness of God and the strength of God's love for her since she herself has said how grateful she is to God for His steadfast love. "I have indeed seen his faithfulness." The Queen has a regular life of prayer, goes weekly to worship. She makes no apologies for her faith and anyone who has seen one of her Christmas broadcasts knows that they include very direct Christian themes and statements. So today we give thanks for the knowledge we share that this marriage of 73 years and the love she has for her husband, whom she often referred to as her strength and stay, we give thanks because we know that this temporal parting is not the end of their love story.

The promise of God is that every tear will be wiped away, that there will be no mourning, no crying. We are reminded of that promise over and over again in the scriptures that there will be no more parting; no more dying; no more heartaches; no more suffering; and no more sadness, because God will wipe away every tear. Grab that image for a moment, God himself tenderly wiping away even a tear from our faces – even the tears of Queens.

Her majesty the Queen and Prince Philip have managed to have a very private and clearly devoted marriage in an age which seems to measure itself by intrusion and the glare of the media and the idea that every word, thought or gesture is for public sharing. Today we celebrate Queen Elizabeth as our sister in Christ, we pray for her to have to space and indeed, privacy, to mourn and to remember.

It is my belief that a tribute for any person in their life is for them to have been seen as steadfast, trustworthy and devoted to the building up of others rather than oneself. As we remember Prince Philip I think it is easy to see that certainly this was true for him. In 2012 during the Diamond Jubilee celebrations Her majesty the Queen said of him that he has been her 'constant strength and guide'. He was dedicated to service only retiring a couple of years ago.

For a public figure Prince Philip was perhaps a surprisingly private man. A man of faith whose journey in Christ began with baptism in the Greek Orthodox church, a journey strongly fostered by his mother and aunt. Prince Philip was received into the Church of England before his wedding on 20 November 1947, in a private service conducted by then Archbishop of Canterbury, Dr Geoffrey Fisher. However his orthodox heritage was always important to him. He was a regular visitor to the monasteries of Mount Athos, and was known to be a keen questioner of preachers, which is a thought that is both terrifying and wonderful. Terrifying because it has to be said he had a reputation for somewhat blunt speaking, wonderful because his faith mattered and was important enough to challenge and go deeper. His Royal Highness' faith was not just lip service to an expected aspect of his role. No, it was vital to his whole being and

to his outlook on life.

Prince Philip also took a keen interest in interfaith matters and this past week the Council of Christians and Jews expressed deep gratitude for the contribution he had made to the strength of the relationship between Jews and Christians. The Council said: “We are confident that this legacy of quiet and faithful service will continue to be an inspiration to all those who work for reconciliation and cooperation between people of different faiths and communities.” As I said before a man of constant faith, a man who believed that people who claimed a faith should be active in the world.

Prince Philip was also deeply involved and supportive of the Templeton Prize for many years”. The Templeton Prize is an award presented annually to a living person who has “made an exceptional contribution to affirming life’s spiritual dimension, whether through insight, discovery, or practical works.” It was Prince Philip who presented the first award to Mother Teresa in 1973, and continued to participate in a private ceremony for the prizewinner held at Windsor Castle or Buckingham Palace. And I quote – “When presenting the award to Mother Teresa, Prince Phillip had said: “At first sight, the idea that a prize might be able to do something for religion seems faintly absurd... I respected the intention of [Mr Templeton’s] imaginative proposal and I have every confidence in the judges, but I doubted whether it would work... It is really Mother Teresa who made this Prize work in the way it was intended.”

The fifth mark of mission of the Anglican Communion calls us all to strive to safeguard the integrity of creation and sustain and renew the life of the earth. Prince Philip was known for being a tireless champion for environmental causes and a passionate ambassador for conservation issues around the world through the World Wildlife Fund and other such organizations.

I think what I am attempting to point to is the interweaving of faith and action in this man’s life. He was never someone to sit on his hands. I think it is fair to say that in the fullness of his life Prince Philip witnessed to the importance of hard work, and of a life of service to neighbour and community. I was celebrating two baptisms this past Saturday and using our well-known prayers. However, this section of the prayer after baptism came to mind when I was preparing this homily:

*Give them an inquiring and discerning heart,
the courage to will and to persevere,
a spirit to know and to love you,
and the gift of joy and wonder
in all your works.*

I believe that God did indeed grant all of these things to Prince Philip, and that His Royal Highness used them well. In the life of Christ that lies before all of us, a place of no titles or divisions of class or society we may know this man just as our brother in Christ.

So, therefore, I ask you to pray for Prince Philip today that his family will be comforted by knowing just how much he is loved by God, and that he has been called home to his father’s house as a beloved child of God, home to someone who loves him as much as it is possible to

love. May he rest in peace and rise in glory having run the course and finished the race and won the crown of righteousness given to all God's children. Thanks be to God. Amen. Alleluia.