

Readings at the Thanksgiving Service of Diana, Princess of Wales
31st August 2007

Prince William

Ephesians Chapter 3, verses 14 to 21

I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth takes its name. I pray that, according to the riches of his glory, he may grant that you may be strengthened in your inner being with power through his Spirit, and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, as you are being rooted and grounded in love. I pray that you may have the power to comprehend, with all the saints, what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

Now to him who by the power at work within us is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, for ever and ever. Amen.

Thanks be to God

Lady Sarah McCorquodale

By J.S. Hoyland (1887 – 1957) from *The Bridge is Love, An Anthology of Hope* collected by Lady Elizabeth Bassett

Teach us, O Father, to trust Thee with life and with death,
And (though this is harder by far)
With the life and death of those that are dearer to us than our life.

Teach us stillness and confident peace
In thy perfect will,
Deep calm of soul and content
In what Thou wilt do with these lives Thou hast given,

Teach us to wait and be still,
To rest in Thyself,
To hush the clamorous anxiety,
To lay in Thine arms all this wealth Thou hast given.

Thou lovest these souls that we love
With a love as far surpassing our own

As the glory of noon surpasses the gleam of a candle.
Therefore will we be still,
And trust in Thee.

Prince Harry

William and I can separate life into two parts. There were those years when we were blessed with the physical presence beside us of both our mother and father. And then there are the ten years since our mother's death. When she was alive we completely took for granted her unrivalled love of life, laughter, fun and folly. She was our guardian, friend and protector. She never once allowed her unfaltering love for us to go unspoken or undemonstrated.

She will always be remembered for her amazing public work. But behind the media glare, to us, just two loving children, she was quite simply the best mother in the world. We would say that wouldn't we. But we miss her. She kissed us last thing at night. Her beaming smile greeted us from school. She laughed hysterically and uncontrollably when sharing something silly she might have said or done that day. She encouraged us when we were nervous or unsure. She – like our father- was determined to provide us with a stable and secure childhood.

To lose a parent so suddenly at such a young age – as others have experienced - is indescribably shocking and sad. It was an event which changed our lives forever, as it must have done for everyone who lost someone that night. But what is far more important to us now, and into the future, is that we remember our mother as she would have wished to be remembered – as she was: fun-loving, generous, down-to-earth, entirely genuine. We both think of her every day. We speak about her and laugh together at all the memories.

Put simply, she made us and so many other people happy. May this be the way that she is remembered.

The Bishop of London

"Who's cheating?" The scene is an old people's home. Two residents are playing 'Beggar my Neighbour' and The Princess enters. The question from the royal visitor is unexpected but everyone laughs. Afterwards they comment on her large eyes and what life she brought into the room.

One tiny incident characteristic of countless other occasions in The Princess's public life in which she found the right word or gesture to bring cheer or comfort.

Everyone here will have their own memories. I remember meeting Princess Diana for the first time early in 1981 to discuss details of the wedding service in St. Paul's. Even Archbishop's Chaplains have their share of proper diffidence and I was nervous entering the presence. It must have been a bewildering time for The Princess as well but even then at the age of 20 her capacity for empathy and her very strong intuitive power ensured that any tension soon evaporated.

Prince Harry has spoken movingly and justly as few others have a right to do about The Princess as a mother. I want to dwell for a moment on her public work, its cost and meaning.

After her marriage, The Princess joined her natural gifts of beauty, empathy, and powerful intuition, with the extraordinary charge which association with the Royal Family generates.

Led by our present Queen and other members of the Royal Family, our constitution has developed in response to the challenges of the past century. There is properly a political sphere in which the monarch may counsel but does not intrude but there is another sphere, vital to any sense of national unity and creativity, in which continuities must be celebrated, common values articulated and the transcendent source of those values honoured.

We tend to be suspicious of political figures who wrap themselves in divinity and claim that their will is God's will but if no one can articulate in an un-ignorable way in the public realm the creative energy of the love that we see in Christ, the human face of God, then we shall find ourselves inhabiting a maimed and diminished society.

At a time when people are suspicious of rhetoric, the monarchy communicates by symbol and simple speech and The Princess brought her own gifts to this work. She was still only 26 in 1987 when she shook the hand of a patient at the opening of the Middlesex Hospital's AIDS ward, the first in the UK. It is hard now to credit the degree of fear and prejudice which surrounded AIDS in the eighties. Those familiar with the field have no doubt that the Princess played a significant part in overcoming a harmful and even cruel taboo in a gesture which was not choreographed but sprang from a deep identification with those who were vulnerable and on the margin. She had a similar impact in the USA and an editorial in the New York Times in 1989 admitted ruefully that it had taken a foreign and even royal dignitary to draw attention to a major public health concern in the U.S.

Her work in the very last year of her life for the victims of landmines also caught the popular imagination internationally and certainly accelerated the adoption of the Ottawa Convention, banning the use of a weapon which disproportionately kills and maims women and children.

She proved the eloquence of embrace and touch which of course have been used by royal healers through the centuries. And as she said "the biggest disease today is not leprosy or TB but the feeling of being unwanted". She sought out places of suffering which are so very often places of truth where the masks have been removed and she was not afraid to be with the dying and to comfort them in an unsentimental way.

Bill Deedes accompanied her on some of her visits. His response to the cynics was typically robust. She was "one who sought above all to help vulnerable people in society and who did it so well. She was good at this because she herself was vulnerable. She knew the feeling. She did not set out to be a saint."

The role brought great power but like any member of the Royal Family she experienced the weight of expectation and the intensity of the scrutiny. Honouring but managing the role and not allowing it to take over one's personal humanity is a desperately difficult task. As we have heard from Prince Harry, his mother Diana did all that she could to prepare her sons for the work which lies ahead.

She confessed to receiving a very great deal from some of those whose lives she touched. She said of John, a young Greek suffering from cystic fibrosis - "He showed no sign of anger, no trace of bitterness but touched us all with an aura of optimism and hope for the future such that I have never before encountered."

The love of Christ described in the lesson read by Prince William contains the essence of the spiritual life. Princess Diana recognised this quality of life in many of those, like John, whose lives she touched. It was a mystery which resonated deeply with her and for which she reached out. The mystery is this, the more you go beyond yourself, the more you will become your true self. The more you lose yourself in loving and serving others, the more you will find yourself. The more you keep company with those who suffer the more you will be healed. This is the knowledge which passes all understanding. This is certain and has been proved experimentally in the life of the saints.

It is easy to lose the real person in the image, to insist that all is darkness or all is light. Still ten years after her tragic death there are regular reports of "fury" at this or that incident and The Princess's memory is used for scoring points. Let it end here. Let this service mark the point at which we let her rest in peace and dwell on her memory with thanksgiving and compassion while we pray in the words of St Paul for all those who serve our country as members of the Royal Family and most especially for the sons who were so precious to her:

"I pray that you being rooted and established in love may have power together with all the saints to grasp what is the breadth and length and depth and height

of the love of Christ and to know this love which surpasses knowledge that you might be filled with the fullness of God." Amen.