

1] The remarkable feature of Her Late Majesty Queen Elizabeth's public life was that it was marked by two ideas: duty and service under God. But a seventy year reign is a long time and the world will always move on. Those two ideas of duty and service served well in that generation, my own father's generation, who had to pass through, what Churchill called, their finest hour.

2] I have witnessed in my own lifetime the profound social and political changes in this kingdom that took place during Queen Elizabeth's reign. And they have not always been for the better in a nation that has grown, in many ways, more atomised and fragmented. Not least, we may note, is that duty and service have certainly become unfashionable in the face of individualism, and a shift of emphasis in life, instead, towards the pursuit of what people imagine they can get out of life; where each one is supposed to live one's own life to the full, extracting as much pleasure and advantage as possible. Duty and service are for most, alien concepts.

3] I am unsure whether I have real optimism for what follows now, with the fading of that war-time generation. We shall see. But our hope is not in this world, no matter how carefully systems and constitutions are fashioned by men, though I do know that a constitutional monarchy within a liberal democracy is a surer defence against tyranny than any other.

4] For all of us, the great body of Orthodox believers, who follow in the way of Christ; who only last Sunday were reminded to deny ourselves and take up His cross, duty and service towards God and His Church can never be an alien concept, a discarded idea, or some relic from a past era. If you have the text, read the words of our rite of Holy Baptism and you will see that we who have been baptised into His death, have been enrolled as servants and soldiers of Christ in a spiritual warfare.

5] All of us, according to our place within the hierarchy of Christ's Church, have our duties. The very word liturgy, I will remind you,

means public service; what the epistle to the Hebrews calls, 'The sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to His name.' Within the Liturgy of the Church each one of us plays a part; to each his or her own liturgy to offer, whether in the nave, before the iconostasis, or within the altar. Each of us, whoever we are, if we want to be known as belonging to Christ, will also submit willingly to the duties of the Christian life that are fulfilled in prayer, in asceticism and in charity. Alongside this, there is the life of service, firstly to those who belong to the household of Our God, Christ's body on earth, and then to those whom we encounter in this life and can help in time of need.

6] All this we undertake not as self-promotion; not as seeking the admiration of others, but in humility, as duty and service, knowing that the power to do these things is given us from God's grace, holding, as St Paul tells us today, 'This treasure in earthen vessels, that the exceeding greatness of power is from God, and not from us.'

7] In the gospel today we heard of the encounter between Our Lord and his first called disciples on the lake of Gennesaret. We heard of the exhausted Peter who had laboured all night to no avail, and yet, at Christ's command finds a blessing in obedience: 'Master, we toiled all night and took nothing! But at Thy word I will let down the nets.' It was through the duty and service of those who were to become the apostles; who left everything and followed Him, and who laboured to proclaim the gospel, that we, in turn, have been established in the faith of Christ. This came about through the apostles' obedience to the call in Christ. It was that key virtue of obedience that enabled their bounden duty and service.

8] Obedience! There's another unfashionable virtue. Yet if we recognise its importance in our own discipleship, we too shall be victors in the spiritual contest. But there is the difficulty; there is the challenge, the contest of wills: shall we do our own will or the will and command of God? Blessed is he who finds that God's will is his own also.

9] The demands of obedience in our life of religious duty and service is not something for monastics alone who, as you know, are

supposed to submit to the directions of their elders and spiritual teachers, and in following the rule of the monastery. We who live in the world, who have not undertaken that burden, are still under the easy yoke of Christ, bearing the cross. And our obedience is first and foremost to the commandments of Christ in the gospel, especially as outlined for us in St Matthew's gospel by Our Lord's Sermon on the Mount.

10] The more we undertake that kind of service, that obedience, not only are we brought closer to the kingdom of God, but are also spiritually changed and will experience progress and the deepening of our knowledge of God which is the greatest of any miracle we might be granted.

11] Certainly, Holy Tradition lays before us all, lay people as well as clergy and monastics, a path of prayer, fasting and almsgiving. It would be wrong and, indeed, spiritually dangerous, to expect us to follow the ascetic labours of the monks on Mount Athos, yet the more we willingly undertake obedience to our rule of life, the more we labour and strive against the passions when they suddenly surge up within us, the more we shall find the cure of our soul and healing of our body. The two, body and soul, will be less and less at enmity and we shall advance from grace to grace. That is what St Paul has called the peace of God that passes understanding. [Phil.4:7]

12] Too often in the past we might have understood our peace to lie somewhere in achieving our own will in all kinds of situations. The truth is, the more we lay before God in our prayers all that we do, the more we refuse to be drawn into actions we know to be wrong, the more we shall know what it is to be truly free, having shaken off the old Adam.

13] Too often in the past we might have had all kinds of good intentions, but without obedience in our duty and service, we shall remain outside and fail to enter into the joy of Our Lord. [St Matt. 23:12] In fact, those things which help and nourish our relationship with Christ are very simple. Just as obedient and attentive pupils progress further in their studies than the disobedient and inattentive, so it is in the spiritual life. 'Let us attend,' the deacon cries frequently

in the Liturgy. Let what we do in church together spill over also into our daily life, attending to the call Christ wherever we are, whatever we do.

14] Meanwhile, let us return to where we began with this United Kingdom. It has ever been the way of the Church, as far as is possible, to live in harmony with those around us and especially with the civil authorities, as long as it is ethically possible. A piece of early Christian writing called, the Epistle of Diognetus, says, 'Christians are distinguished from other men neither by country, nor language, nor the customs which they observe... But, inhabiting Greek as well as barbarian cities, according as the lot of each of them has determined, and following the customs of the natives... they display to us their wonderful and confessedly striking method of life. They dwell in their own countries, but simply as sojourners. As citizens, they share in all things with others, and yet endure all things as if foreigners.'

15] We do not have national churches in Orthodox Christianity, or anything that speaks of ethnic exclusivity. We have only local churches, respecting those who govern, for as Paul's epistle to the Romans says of the ruler that, 'He is God's minister to you for good. But if you do evil, be afraid; for he does not bear the sword in vain; for he is God's minister, an avenger to execute wrath on him who practices evil. Therefore you must be subject, not only because of wrath but also for conscience' sake.' (Rom.13:4-5)

16] And ever obedient to the first epistle to Timothy, we shall continue to offer, 'Supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks... all men, for kings and all who are in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and reverence.' St Peter also exhorts us, 'Therefore submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake, whether to the king as supreme, or to governors, as to those who are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers and for the praise of those who do good... Honour all people. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honour the king.' (1 Pet.2:13-17)

17] Remember, the apostles here speak of the early Christians acknowledging pagan emperors. We, though, in our new Sovereign

Lord, King Charles III, have one who is very sympathetic to the Orthodox faith and has himself been a frequent visitor to Mount Athos. You may notice that we pray for him by name in the Synaxis, but only under his title of king at the Great Entrance, as he is not in communion with us. So, obedient to our tradition, we shall continue to pray for our ruler in our liturgical service, striving to observe all just laws in this realm, though always obedient to God's law first. God save the king!