Sunday Choral Healing Service: The Accession 6.2.22:

The Priest Pastor

70 years ago today a young woman climbed into a tree one day, a Princess and climbed down from the tree next day a Queen. When Princess Elizabeth left the UK for an official trip to Kenya, she knew her father was terminally ill and that she would succeed him eventually. But it must have been a shock to hear of his death, a man she loved dearly, and instantly to know that she had acceded to the throne at the age of 25. The death of a parent can evoke a whole host of emotions; especially a parent who died aged 56, but one can only imagine the other host of emotions for a 25 year old knowing that at that moment of bereavement she had become Queen.

Attitudes to the monarchy vary in the world and in the church. But I suspect that even the most hardened republican would be prepared to admit that the Queen represents something that is in rather short supply in public life; dedication, duty, service, and personal sacrifice.

And this has been underpinned by a deep sense of Christian vocation. At her coronation, she was given an orb and sceptre both mounted by a cross – that symbolised that she is the servant of a greater king, Jesus Christ. But her biographer, William Shawcross wrote that the moment of supreme importance for her was when she was anointed with holy oil, on her hands, her chest, and her head. These were the words the archbishop used ‘As kings, priests and prophets were anointed king by Zadok the priest and Nathan the prophet so be thou, anointed, blessed, and consecrated Queen over the peoples whom the Lord thy God has given thee to rule and govern’. This is a vocation that began even before her accession. On her 21st birthday she declared that ‘all my whole life whether it be long or short shall be devoted to your service’.
And it is clear that is her personal faith that has sustained her as she continues to work into her 90s. Twenty years ago she said ‘I know just how much I rely on my faith to guide me through the good times and the bad. Each day is a new beginning. I know that the only way to live my life is to try to do what is right, to take the long view, to give of my best in all that the day brings, and to put my trust in God… I draw strength from the message of hope in the Christian gospel’.

And she has certainly needed to draw strength from God over the 70 years of her reign. She has lived through war, the divorce of her three children, family estrangement, scandal, the most enormous social and political change and the bereavement of her husband during a pandemic. All this has been played out in the public view, her personal life being a subject of intense scrutiny and entertainment. While it has clearly been a life of great privilege, it is a life that has required the kind of stamina one can only guess at. Never known to be late, to lose her temper, to swear or to refuse to carry out a duty expected of her. Her faith has shone through her Christmas broadcasts over the years, and indeed the first Easter broadcast given at the height of lockdown when she spoke powerfully of the resurrection.

Tonight’s reading from Proverbs speaks of the wisdom of God that is better than gold or jewels; it is what gives kings and rulers the insight to know what is just. And Psalm 20 reminds us that the only thing to take pride in is in the name of the Lord our God, who gives victory to the King. And so on this 70th anniversary of the Accession, we give thanks for our monarch who knows these things, who gives us an example of endurance and dedication underpinned by faith. We give thanks for her service. We continue to pray for her, as every church does. And we pray too for healing for her family; healing for the hurts that have and are being experienced. And for those of her subjects who are going through similar.

God save the Queen!