

‘We do not lose heart’ words from our second reading, St Paul’s Second Letter to the Corinthians.

‘Grief is the price we pay for love’. These are the words of Her Late Majesty Queen Elizabeth writing to the people of New York in the wake of the terrorist attack 21 years ago today. ‘Grief is the price we pay for love’.

Her friends and family are grieving the loss of a mother, a grandmother and great grandmother. They are paying the price for love about which she wrote. For many of us, the death of Queen Elizabeth has brought a grief of its own.

For some of us, we are grieving the loss of a connection with friends and loved ones we hold dear and who themselves have passed away. The generation of our parents or grandparents seems somehow that bit further away. ‘Time, like an ever-rolling stream, has born one of its daughters away’ as we sang in our first hymn, and with it, the chapter which contained our own dearly departed seems somehow further away.

Family memories in which the Queen stood as one constant fixture of our national life seem that bit further away. Christmas messages, Jubilee street parties, shared glimpses of the Queen on state occasions, or even just happy memories of Bank Holidays the Queen’s constant story entwined with our own personal and family stories.

The Queen stood as an apparent constant in a world of tremendous change. In her first Christmas message as Queen, she reflected on the ‘grave problems and difficulties’ which confronted the nation at the end of two devastating world wars. She spoke then of having ‘a new faith in the old’ and ‘strength to venture beyond the safeties of the past’ to confront those problems and difficulties. These words are as true now as they were then. Time and time again, throughout her reign we saw how she embodied this faith in the old with the strength to venture beyond the safeties of the past, from an age-old tea with Paddington to a rather less safe parachute with James Bond.

For many of us too, the death of Queen Elizabeth has reminded us of those for whom we pay the price of love, those for whom we grieve. We're reminded of our own mothers or grandmothers. We find ourselves having permission to grieve more openly than the world sometimes allows. One person grieving the loss of a loved one said to me this week that the world was finally catching up with the pain they were already feel, that pain which is the price of love.

It's easy to make the Queen into a kind of national character, a kind of constant fairytale, and to ignore the remarkable woman who embodied the role of remarkable monarch for these past 70 years. To do so is to miss the incredible character of the person who we came to know as the Queen. Whether royalist or republican, her strength of character was a constant in a life given to the service of her nation and the promises to that nation which she made.

In 1947, upon turning 21, she declared that 'her whole life whether it be long or short shall be devoted to service'. She spoke at the dawn of a new world, full of potential leaving the old ways of warfare and division that marked the first half of the twentieth century behind. She recognised to fulfil this potential, 'to accomplish that we must give nothing less than the whole of ourselves'.

This life of dedication to duty, this life of commitment to service, this life of giving nothing less than the whole of ourselves is a way of life from which we can learn whatsoever or whosoever we are called to be.

The constancy of this life is all the more remarkable given that it wasn't until she was ten years old, following the abdication of her Uncle, that she became heir in line to the throne. Hers was a vocation which she was not expecting. Ours may be a vocation which we do not expect. God may call us in ways we do not imagine or for which are not prepared.

Whatever we are called to do, however unexpected our vocation, the life of Queen Elizabeth the Second models for us how to live out that to which we are called: in service, with duty, and giving nothing less than the whole of ourselves.

The life of the person who was a constant feature for our nation, had at its heart its own constant. In recent years, Queen Elizabeth spoke more and more of the importance of her relationship to Jesus Christ. In her 2014 Christmas address she describes this relationship: 'for me, the life of Jesus Christ, the Prince of Peace, whose birth we celebrate today, is an inspiration and an anchor in my life. A role-model of reconciliation and forgiveness, he stretched out his hands in love, acceptance and healing. Christ's example has taught me to seek to respect and value all people of whatever faith or none.' Jesus was her 'guiding light' she said 'because Christ's example helps me see the value of doing small things with great love, whoever does them and whatever they themselves believe'.

As she reflected on Christ's example, during her life, so we can, at the end of her life, reflect on the example she has given all of us of constancy, of duty, of service, of giving nothing less than the whole of ourselves whatever we are called to do and to be. To allow ourselves like her to find inspiration in a love which respects and values all people, and rejoices in small things done with with great love. It's this example and this love for which we all can grieve, as in Her Majesty's words, we pay the price of love.

May Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth the Second rest in peace and rise in glory, and may flights of angels sing her to her rest. Amen.