**Heaven’s Light, her Guide**

***The sermon preached by the Rt Rev Jonathan Frost, Bishop of Portsmouth, in Portsmouth Cathedral, at the civic service of thanksgiving and commemoration for HM Queen Elizabeth II:***

St Paul writes: ‘Do not lag in zeal, be ardent in spirit, serve the Lord.’

Deputy Lord Lieutenant, Lord Mayor, dear friends: may the peace, comfort and strength of Christ be with you all.

It is right and good, and greatly to our comfort, that we gather in this Cathedral Church, which was honoured and visited by our late Sovereign Queen Elizabeth. We gather to commemorate her life and to give heartfelt thanks to the living God for all that her reign has given us.

And we gather – in the heart of a City which bears as its motto ‘Heaven’s Light, Our Guide’ – to seek the light and guidance of God’s Holy Spirit for all that lies ahead for ourselves and our nation.

As we gather we bring our whole selves:

* inner lives that have been shaken by news we knew had to come, but which we never thought would actually happen.
* Inner lives in which a complex range of emotions and feelings are, no doubt, present: sadness and gratitude; old griefs and new.

I imagine we will all have experienced a strange and curious blend of memories, thoughts and feelings over the last nine days or so. My dear friends, whatever you feel, whatever memories have been stirred up for you - as grief and loss have come to visit - may I encourage you to bring everything to the living God in prayer? To *share* what is on your heart with those you trust around you? For as the Psalmist writes: ‘Yea, though I walk through death’s dark vale, yet will I fear none ill; for thou art with me”.

Today, sorrow and gratitude, commemoration and thanksgiving, join hands. As Dominic Grant puts it so beautifully in words we will sing together in a few moments:

“We stand to mourn a Sovereign,

A nation’s guide and friend,

who through long years of tumult

was faithful to the end.

We offer our thanksgiving

for all that she instilled:

Her constancy of service,

Her lifetime’s vow fulfilled.”

Our late beloved Sovereign was indeed ‘guide and friend’ to our nation. Over the last week or so, stories have poured forth of Queen Elizabeth’s wisdom and compassion.

Only days before inviting her last Prime Minister to form a government, pictures were released of Queen Elizabeth, leaning over her walking cane, listening intently to another older person, fully focused on the person before her, with radiant smile and words of encouragement.

Much has rightly been spoken of Queen Elizabeth’s constancy of service, her commitment to duty. And so it is surely right and wise, on this day of all days, as we pause to commemorate and to give thanks, *to enquire of the source of the virtues we have seen*: her wisdom, compassion, sense of duty and service.

For if these enduring virtues do not simply arise from thin air – virtues we have seen and heard, virtues formed so deeply into the pattern of Queen Elizabeth’s life as they were – then *from whence* do they flow? What is their source?

And how, if we would learn from her life, may we too drink deeply from that life-irradiating, life-giving source?

We find a clue and a signpost in our very own City’s motto; a clue and a signpost pointing to same Source emblazoned on our City’s crest – what does it say? hidden in plain sight before us ‘Heaven’s Light, our Guide’

For without reckoning on Queen Elizabeth’s life of **prayer** – ‘heaven in ordinarie’, ‘soul in paraphrase’ as George Herbert describes it; without weighing the significance or admitting the impact of her relationship with *Jesus Christ* –

the Crucified and Risen Lord,

Love’s Open Door,

Light piercing every darkness

 - we will miss or exclude the key to her lifetime of service, her unswerving duty, wisdom and compassion.

All these ‘enduring things’, flowed for our great good from her Christian faith and prayerful devotion to the of Jesus Christ; a way open to each one of us and only ever a prayer away.

In our great loss, dear friends, we do indeed give thanks and praise to God that for our late beloved Queen, our sister in Christ: Heaven’s Light was her Guide.