

Living God. May these words lead us to your living word, the risen Jesus Christ, our lord. Amen.

This is indeed a significant moment in our national life. Our first thoughts are, of course, for the Queen, in the loss of her husband, and consort. Theirs has been a lifetime of extraordinary, and dedicated, public service together.

Some of you may have been in the crowds at a Buckingham Palace garden party. I remember going a few years ago and I was struck by the way that the Queen and Prince Philip, both in their 90s at the time, stood for three hours solid, engaging in conversation in that way that we have seen on so many occasions through the years. It seemed to symbolise that sense of duty, and commitment, that has been at the heart of their relationship and their life.

We have been praying here for the Queen, and the Royal Family, and we will continue to do so. Like all families after a bereavement, they will be experiencing a range of emotions; alongside that busyness and fatigue which happens in these days.

But this is also a time for gratitude to God for Prince Philip's life. He was a born leader who had to learn to be a follower. Much has already been written of his loyalty to the Queen; the way that he carved out a role for himself in terms of public service; the award scheme that he launched 65 years ago this year; his commitment to charities that focused on young people, education, and conservation; and, of course, his forthright style.

He had an inquiring mind, that engaged in debates around theology, but also human character and purpose.

We can always learn from the lives of others, and I am struck by three particular aspects of his life. First, his international background. We know that he arrived here as an exile, if you like. He was the most loyal of British citizens, but he saw himself belonging to a bigger project. He was a global citizen, who spoke other languages, and had connections with many other countries. His life played into, at the very minimum, the nations of the commonwealth. His was an outward-looking international vision.

Secondly one of the comments that both the Queen, and the Royal Family, have made references to is his modesty. 'Talk about everything else; don't talk about yourself' was one of his lines. He, according to the Queen, did not take easily to compliments.

Modesty is that quality of not drawing attention to yourself, or your achievements. And this fed into the third mark: his sense of public service and duty. Modesty, and duty, are both attitudes that have frankly fallen out of cultural currency. They have, perhaps, been overtaken by celebrity culture, and its many variants.

Actually, both those virtues, when they are allied to public service, serve the common good rather well. And perhaps we need to reflect on the virtues that we now need, for the world that we face.

But let us also recognise that the longevity of service, that the Queen and Prince Philip have offered, has been a stabilising factor, not just post-Second World War, but throughout our

lives. The events of the last few years globally place us at a point of *instability*, and the pandemic of the last year connects the nation's current experience of mourning within other significant streams of grief. We are at a time of loss and instability. We are feeling our own mortality.

Jesus came, and stood among them, and said: "Peace be with you".

In the story of Holy Week and Easter, human beings are all over the place. Today St. John records a room occupied by the disciples, perhaps the same room as they have been occupying for some days. It is dark outside, and fearful inside. The door is locked, and we are invited to feel the dread.

The future is very uncertain. They are at a point of instability and grief. And the presence of the risen Christ disturbs, and contradicts, the mood. His words are, of course, more than just a greeting. They are proclaiming the stable constant at the heart of our very existence. Love *has* come again, but it has come at a terrible price. He showed them his hands, and his side.

The cry of abandonment, on Good Friday, is replaced by the 'shalom' word: a word of hope and possibility; a word of healing for fractured lives. And it's accompanied by another image of life: breath.

Here He is, the risen Christ, breathing new purpose, and life, into a very lost community.

And for one of them – Thomas - whose honesty is never in doubt, this visitation draws out his search for truth, and the voice of faith: "my lord and my God".

The voice of someone who has found who he is looking for; the voice of someone who has just found his future.

At such a time as this, may our Christian witness reflect that rock-like stability of God's faithfulness. The creative breath of the one who seeks to heal fractured lives, and the sheer amazement of the risen Christ among us.

Jesus came, and stood among them, and said: "Peace be with you".

It is *the* Easter gift that we share with each other, in every service like this, every week.

Amen.