



A PASTORAL LETTER

AT A TIME OF NATIONAL MOURNING

TO BE READ AT ALL MASSES ON SUNDAY 11th SEPTEMBER 2022

Dear brothers and sisters,

I am writing to you this Sunday following the sad news of the death of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II. With so many across the country and across the world, we share a sense of loss today of a Head of State and the Commonwealth who exemplified duty and public service. We have, indeed, been blessed to live in the reign of the Second Elizabeth and to have known such an example at the centre of our national life. The Queen's tireless service across more than 70 years, was always sustained by her faith in Christ and her daily prayer. It was the promises she had made before God and a strong sense of her Christian vocation that was the foundation of her daily work in the affairs of State and Commonwealth, in building closer relationships with nations across the world and in the kindly words and encouragement she would offer to a countless number. We also cannot forget today her warm welcome to these shores of Saint John Paul II, the first Pope to visit our land, and of his successor Pope Benedict XVI.

I had written a longer Pastoral Letter for this Sunday to prepare for the Pilgrimage of the Relics of Saint Bernadette of Lourdes. This beautiful pilgrimage will continue in the week ahead at Shrewsbury and Chester as an invitation to prayer and as an encouragement in our Christian vocation. I have asked the clergy to make available in printed or electronic form, the words I wanted to share on the relics of the Saints and the witness of Saint Bernadette.

However, in this time of national mourning I am conscious of the expressions of grief and grateful remembrance which will mark the days ahead. People can sometimes be unsure today how to respond to death and to the sudden shock which comes with the loss of someone who has always been part of our lives. The faith that we share in Christ's Cross and Resurrection leads us to pray for those who have died.

From the beginning, the Church has offered prayers for the dead, above all in the Eucharistic Sacrifice, that purified from every sin, they may come to the perfection of love and finally attain the beatific vision of God.ⁱ In this way our feelings of loss and grief are directed into this prayer filled with Christian hope. As the great bishop Saint John Chrysostom wrote some 1500 years before us, *“Let us not hesitate to help those who have died and to offer our prayers for them.”*

This must always be our final duty of charity to everyone we have known in this life, and this must surely be our final duty to Queen Elizabeth II, to pray that she may rest in peace. It for this reason, that we not merely commemorate our longest serving Monarch, but remember her in Christian prayer. In the same way, let us also remember the family who mourns Queen Elizabeth most as a mother and grandmother, our Royal Family. The world of modern media can often portray public figures merely as celebrities rather than as the people, the souls we must pray for.

It is slightly startling for all of us who have known the Queen throughout our lifetimes to hear the words *“God save the King.”* Yet, today I want us to keep in prayer King Charles III as he begins his reign and continues his mother’s life-long service. Our national anthem takes the form of a prayer and reminds us of the Apostle Paul’s guidance to the young bishop Timothy: *“I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people, for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way.”*ⁱⁱ

Let us use these days of national mourning and this time of the accession and eventually coronation of a new King, to remember all we should pray for both living and departed. May the soul of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II rest in peace. May her family and our nation find light and strength in the Christian faith she shared. And may our new King be granted strength and wisdom in all the ways he is called to serve.

United with you in this prayer,

+ *Mark*

Bishop of Shrewsbury

ⁱ Cf. Catechism of the Catholic Church No. 1032

ⁱⁱ I Tim. 2: 2,3