

Our Faithful Queen

70 Years of Faith & Service

BY CHRISTOPH LINDNER

On 6 February 1952, Elizabeth Alexandra Mary Windsor became Queen. Arrangements began almost immediately for her Coronation.

To help her prepare for her new role, the then Archbishop of Canterbury, Geoffrey Fisher, wrote *A Little Book of Private Devotions* - short, daily meditations with Bible readings and prayers. Fewer than a dozen copies were printed. The first words the Archbishop gave the Queen to consider in the Devotions were a prayer from the Bible: 'Show me your ways, Lord, teach me your paths. Guide me in your truth and teach me, for you are God my Saviour, and my hope is in you all day long.' By accepting her role, the Queen sacrificed her personal preferences and private life to adopt a life of duty and service in obedience to God's call, trusting him to lead her.

"Pray that God may give me wisdom and strength to carry out the solemn promises I shall be making, and that I may faithfully serve him and you, all the days of my life."
(From her Majesty's first Christmas broadcast as Queen in 1952)

Looking ahead to the moment when she would kneel in private prayer in front of Westminster Abbey's altar as the ceremony began, the Devotions invited



her to use 'the simplest words of trust in God and of trusting oneself to God' - words from the Bible:

'In quietness and trust is your strength...'
(Isaiah 30 verse 15)

'Do not let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God; believe also in me.'
(Jesus in John 14 verse 1)

The Coronation Oath required the Queen to promise to cause Law and Justice, in Mercy, to be executed in all your judgments.' In preparation, she prayed this prayer from the Devotions: 'Lord, give us grace never to betray thy truth and never to deny thy love, but by thy guidance in every dealing with thy neighbours to speak and do the truth in love to the restraint of evil and the reconciling of men to thee, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.'



This prayer has been put to the test many times during her long reign. In June 2012, in an extraordinary gesture, she visited Northern Ireland and

shook hands with Martin McGuinness, who had been a commander of the Provisional IRA until 1975, just four years before the Queen's second cousin Lord Louis Mountbatten was blown up by an IRA bomb.

“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.”

(The Queen's Christmas broadcast in 2014)

Regular Bible reading and weekly church attendance has been a lifelong pattern for the Queen who is said to keep a well-read Bible by her bedside. In the Devotions Archbishop Fisher reminded the Queen of Jesus' words in Luke's Gospel: 'You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.' He then invited her to pray: 'Almighty God... grant that the light of thy Gospel may shine forth bright and clear to all mankind, and may bring all men to a true faith in thee; through the same Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.' In her address to the General Synod of the Church of England in 2010 she said: "What matters is holding firmly to the need to communicate the gospel



with joy and conviction in our society." Although normal family life has hardly been possible for the Queen, she places a high value on family as the core of a thriving community. At Christmas 2007, the year she and Prince Philip celebrated their Diamond Wedding, she said: "In my experience, the positive value of a happy family is one of the factors of human existence that has not changed. The immediate family... is still the core of a thriving community." In 2021 the nation was moved by the picture of the Queen sitting alone at the funeral of her husband, the Duke of Edinburgh, whom she described as her 'strength and stay'.

The last prayer in the Devotions is a prayer for each of us, for all our lives:

‘God be in my head, and in my understanding. God be in mine eyes, and in my looking. God be in my mouth, and in my speaking. God be in my heart, and in my thinking. God be at my end, and my departing.’

(This is an extract from a beautifully illustrated book by Catherine Butcher.