

Victoria Day (2023)
1st Peter 2:11-17; Psalm 72

All Royals All the Time

May 21, 2023

First Peter 2:11-17

Beloved, I urge you as aliens and exiles to abstain from the desires of the flesh that wage war against the soul. Conduct yourselves honourably among the Gentiles, so that, though they malign you as evildoers, they may see your honourable deeds and glorify God when he comes to judge.

For the Lord's sake accept the authority of every human institution, whether of the emperor as supreme, or of governors, as sent by him to punish those who do wrong and to praise those who do right. For it is God's will that by doing right you should silence the ignorance of the foolish. As servants of God, live as free people, yet do not use your freedom as a pretext for evil. Honour everyone. Love the family of believers. Fear God. Honour the emperor.

Intro

The death of Queen Elizabeth the Second and the coronation of King Charles earlier this month got me thinking about Royals. We have Royals in our bible-- King David of Psalm 72, the emperor of 1st Peter. It is Victoria Day weekend, so I thought it an auspicious time to reflect on our constitutional monarchy from a biblical, theological and discipleship perspective.

I have been in conversations with people who have no use for our current arrangement with the crown. They may be right, but at a practical level changing the system seems more costly and divisive than anything. I do care about money, and the number of loonies sacrificed in such an endeavour, royals aside, makes no sense to me. And from this Mennonite preacher's perspective, our form of government doesn't really matter.

Take the early church, for example, at the time 1st Peter or Romans 13 were written the church was living with emperors who make the House of Windsor look innocent as doves. In spite of persecution; in spite of prosecution; in spite of execution-- the epistles to the churches simply told people to pray for their government. This is quite shocking, actually.

I think the early church leaders understood that the Good News is not constrained or contained by whatever government is claiming political power. Not the emperor, not the Liberals, not the Sask Party, not King Charles—God's word will go forth in the noble acts in which we engage, the compassion we exhibit, the kindness and generosity we extend. Pray for them, they said, they need our prayers as much as others. Who knows, they thought, maybe those politicians will be more benevolent on account of our prayers and maybe they might even embrace the faith.

With this sentiment in mind, I have compiled stories of three royals. It is the Elizabeth parade-- all Elizabeths and all royals. Perhaps we may learn something from their lives.

Elizabeth of Hungry (1207-1231)¹

“We must give God what we have, gladly and with joy.”

St. Elizabeth of Hungry was the daughter of Hungarian royalty. At the age of four, in a politically arranged match, she was betrothed to the future landgrave (prince) of Thuringia in southern Germany. So she was sent away from her family to live in the castle of her future husband, Ludwig, at the time a boy of nine. It may be supposed that such matches seldom tended to genuine romance. In this case, however, it appears that the two children developed an intimate friendship which eventually blossomed into loving devotion...Elizabeth's piety steadily transgressed the boundaries of what was considered good taste. The young princess dressed too simple, it was said; she was inordinate in her prayer and profligate in her almsgiving. Ludwig, however, rejected any suggestion of returning her to Hungary; he declared that he would sooner part with a mountain of gold than be parted from the woman he affectionally called his “dear other”.

In due time they were married amid much ceremony. Elizabeth gave birth to three children in quick succession, and she rejoiced that as Landgravine of Thuringia, she now had much greater scope of her charitable activities. She established several hospitals for the indigent and aroused scandal by nursing the sick and even lepers with her own hands...When famine struck the kingdom, while Ludwig was away, Elizabeth took it upon herself to open the royal grainers to the poor. Many lives were spared through her generosity...

This generosity caught up with her. Their medieval jet set friends and family got tired of her altruism. She was eventually disposed of her castle and her capital. Seemingly unphased, she started new work spinning shawls for the sick and ministering to them in the hospitals she had founded. “The spectacle of this princess working at a spinning wheel or nursing the sick in their homes or in the hospices...inspired grudging respect of those who had persecuted her, as well as the devoted affection of the poor and common folk.” What is the discipleship of Elizabeth of Hungry?

- Rest in God's love of you be you child, princess, or pauper
- Listen to God's leading wherever you find yourself
- She had 24 years; how shall we spend the next quarter of a decade
- Feed the hungry as you are able
- Shy not from the menial tasks which feed the hungry and clothe the naked

¹ Robert Ellsberg, *All Saints: Daily Reflections on Saints, Prophets, and Witnesses For Our Time* (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 2011 edition), pp 501-502.

Elizabeth of Portugal (1271--1336)²

Do not forget that when sovereigns are at war, they can no longer busy themselves with the administration: justice is not distributed; no care is taken of the people; and this alone is your sovereign charge, this the main point of your [royal] duty. Like her great-aunt St. Elizabeth of Hungary, St. Elizabeth of Portugal was a royal daughter, betrothed as a child to a foreign prince for reasons of estate. Her husband was less gracious as Ludwig. Neglect and infidelity were a part of who he chose to be, and a grieving son nearly fomented a civil war. Elizabeth negotiated a family truce and became affectionally known as “the Peacemaker”. Different than the Colt 45, but well respected. Her talents as a peacemaker were exercised on an even greater level when she personally prevented a war between Portugal and Castile.

Elizabeth lived up to the public responsibilities of her office as queen. But the greater part of her time was spent in prayer and a variety of charitable projects. She established hospitals, orphanages, and religious houses throughout the kingdom, as well as halfway homes for “fallen women”.

Like her aunt, her husband died and she lived the final years of her life in relative poverty devoted to prayer and the poor. What do we learn from these related Elizabeths?

- Spouses may not always share charitable intentions or even values, but that does not nor should not stop a person from being charitable
- Our riches and poverty are fleeting. Let us be generous at the start of day, at noon, and as the sun goes down
- Being a peacemaker starts in the home and extends into our places of work and country; we can strive to negotiate peace filled results

QEII

I was taken with some of Queen Elizabeth II’s words offered at her coronation way back in the 1950s: “I have in sincerity pledged myself to your service, as so many of you are pledged to mine. Throughout all my life and with all my heart I shall strive to be worthy of your trust.” This is Queen I came to know. She was the queen I affirmed allegiance to when becoming a Canadian. And then she died.

It was expected, I guess. Tom Allen had a segment on his CBC show “About Time” regarding the queen. I was taken with several quotes he offered as well as the classical music. In 1977, during a sovereignty debate in Quebec which threatened the continuity of the country, the Queen delivered a televised address to Canadians stating, What is most evident in looking at “your country from the long-term point of view is that Canada's accomplishments and progress have, from

² Robert Ellsberg, *All Saints: Daily Reflections on Saints, Prophets, and Witnesses For Our Time* (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 2011 edition), pp 293-294.

the first moment, been the results of the joint efforts and joint councils of Canadians of every background”.³ These were words offered from beyond us to us which still bear relevancy. Are we really better off to create our own revenue agency in Saskatchewan? Are we really better off to foster separatist sentiments in the east, west or north? Sometimes a word offered from beyond us is good for us.

I have watched enough of the Crown, however, to hold these sentiments alongside the pain of the royal family. The Queen lived through several “annus horribilus”—horrible years in relation to fires and family dysfunction. Could she not have done something to mitigate the domestic carnage? Queen Elizabeth II championed public and voluntary service around the world. She was patron of more than 600 charities and organizations, of which 36 are in Canada.⁴ This is commendable. And yet I am left with the grief that there was much pain within her household that was largely untouched. What do we learn from Queen Elizabeth the second?

- Maybe that we benefit for voices beyond ourselves speaking into our reality: a parent’s voice, a royal voice, the church, maybe even God.
- Maybe we learn that charity in the home is at least as beneficial as charity out in the Commonwealth.
- Maybe that our royals need our prayers as much as anyone.

Conclusion

We are at the end of the sermon. Throughout it I have tried to highlight items which might go with us:

- The Royals, and government what ever its ilk, isn’t that bad. At least not here. Stalin, Idi Amin and the 21st century manifestations of them—can we be courageous and pray for them? This is not to condone and accept the temporal rule; it places them and their policies under the rule of God.
- Personal piety will see you through much. You may be sent off at a young age to foreign lands or find yourself in a difficult relationship or be disposed of your earthly treasures. One’s relationship with God can not be taken away.
- Good conduct is the manner in which the early church survived and thrived. Be accepting of those new to our community. Don’t talk badly about neighbours, the royals or others. They, too, are loved by God who is seeking to be present to them and extend good through them.

Well, that is probably more than anyone wanted or needed for a Victoria Day sermon. So, it is Amen at this point. Amen.

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³ Queen, in Address to Canadians, Makes Appeal for National Unity - The New York Times (nytimes.com); 1977.

⁴ Queen Elizabeth II - Canada.ca