

At this point a lot has been said about the late Queen, much of it many, many times over; her life, her personality, her service, her dedication, the woman she was. There is nothing I can say that has not been already said, but on this eve of her funeral I would like to think about probably the least reported aspect of her reign and in some ways, for us here today at least, one of the most important.

The Monarch of England is the Supreme Governor of the Church of England. I've spent quite a lot of the last week explaining, as best I can to a random collection of people, from my dentist to dog walkers what that does and does not mean. What it doesn't mean is that the monarch is a sort of Anglican Pope. Nor by the way is the Archbishop of Canterbury, though they don't always seem to read that memo. The Monarch's authority as Supreme Governor of the Church of England is exercised over temporal matters, the things of this world. This had important consequences in the Middle Ages when Bishops wielded significant secular power and the Church was rich; no King of England could afford not to be involved in the life of the Church. Now, however, the Church has barely a scraping of soft power and is ever more impoverished: the rôle of Supreme Governor is largely symbolic. Not unimportant, but similar to the Monarch's role in the government of the country. Bishops and Cathedral deans are officially appointed by the Crown, but in reality chosen by the church. So yes, the monarch is the Supreme Governor of the C of E which, contrary to popular parlance doesn't mean he or she's 'the boss'. *The Boss* - even in the more obscure reaches of the law of the land- is him who sits on the Heavenly Throne.

This might make the Queen or King seem little more a very high ranking line manager the person on whose behalf appointments are made and nothing more. But of course, there is more,

By all accounts the late Queen Elizabeth was a good woman; loved by those who really knew her and by those who really didn't. She was dedicated and hard working. This combination of goodness, being widely loved, dedication is unusual though not, perhaps unique. In one way, though, Elizabeth was one of a kind: we was the only anointed monarch of this kingdom. For us here today, that matters.

Let us look back into history to see why. The ancient church recognised a lot of sacraments, those outward and visible signs of inward and spiritual grace.. A lot of sacraments.. Basically, anything- and everything in the world could, potentially, be a channel for God's grace. That's the beauty of an incarnate God who makes himself available through the things of the world. There were a lot of sacraments, certainly

many more than what the seven the church of the high middle ages had settled on. You may or may not have noticed that many ancient fonts are seven sided- on each side would be a depiction of the seven sacraments- baptism, eucharist, confession, confirmation, anointing, holy orders and last making up to the magic number of seven, matrimony. The Church of England. though tracing its origins back, naturally enough to Jesus himself and the apostles, found its mojo somewhere in the middle of the Christian era and, being Anglicans exist in several different versions of sacramentality. For the lower church as exemplified by the 39 Articles and the Catechism, there are just the two sacraments- baptism and communion. Elsewhere in the Anglican world some go with the traditional flow and acknowledge the standard seven. And then for the highest fringes of Anglicanism you can add another which is, I suppose, theoretically available to all but in practical terms only experienced by a very few, which is Coronation.

Famously, the coronation of Elizabeth II was televised- but not all of it made it onto the small screen. Part of the ceremony was considered too holy to be broadcast and was kept from the cameras, the part where the Queen as anointed with Holy Oil. If you've been baptised or confirmed, or ordained, you will have been anointed. Anointing is making the sign of the cross on a person- their forehead, their hands perhaps and very occasionally elsewhere- with olive oil made holy by blessing, usually by a bishop. Depending on its intended use it may be perfumed, often with spikenard, becoming oil of Chrism. This is the kind used at confirmations, ordinations and coronations, and marks out what has been going on as a sacrament.

If- as you really should- you believe that baptism, confirmation, ordination and so on effects a spiritual change upon a person, then too so coronation. All the sacraments are of course wrought upon earthly vessels: and though there is spiritual change, outwardly we remain fragile, frail and flawed. Just like us, the anointed monarch is all too human; but a spiritual *potentiality* is there in a way that wasn't before. The Coronation Ceremony is not just a spectacular pageant: it is a profoundly religious event. This is why the Church of England- as reflected in its formularies and liturgies- gives a unique status to the monarch: not because the King or Queen is 'the Boss', but because of their coronation. In the language of former times, they are God's anointed. To us in the Church of England at least, that means something.

You may be thinking, well this is all very interesting, it explains why the Church is doing what it is doing, but it doesn't really get to the heart of what we're feelings right now. And that's true, it doesn't. You can't really get emotional about an abstract

theological concept. We live in a constitutional monarchy where our head of state is the Supreme Governor of the Church of England. Most of us have no idea of what this means; much of what it means is indeed arcane, opaque and symbolic, less a thing than a way of doing things. So perhaps it matters little, and what matters more right now is that all of us recognise loss. Whatever our theological or political beliefs or positions we all recognise loss.

One of the things that has been said many many times since September 8th this year, is the Queen's death marks the passing of an era, it is the end of an age. But this is not really true: time does not pass in chunks or blocks, it is a constant trickle of loss. And the passing of someone as well known for so long as the Queen can make us suddenly aware of that trickle, provoke in a collecting into coherence of all the grains of grief that have been our constant companion through the years to now. To live is to lose, and at times such as the death of our Sovereign, it is almost inevitable that we will feel this loss.

We bring nothing into this world, and when our lives end we will have lost everything. But the Christian hope is that as we lose everything of this world, we gain the inexpressible joys of the next.

*O God, the maker and redeemer of all humanity,
grant us, with your servant QUEEN ELIZABETH and all the faithful departed, the sure
benefits of your Son's saving passion and glorious resurrection;
that in the last day, when all things are gathered up in Christ, we may with them enjoy the
fullness of thy promises.*