



ST JAMES AYR – SUNDAY REFLECTIONS – 18 April 2021



HRH Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh

1921-2021

## Introduction

Dear all,

Welcome to this week's Sunday Reflection. I wish you God's blessing in this coming week.

We have new guidance and can now encourage you to distribute these devotions through your friends' letterboxes, please do so if you can.

### Intimations:

Please remember or video and audio service

North Ayr Prayer meetings have started again on zoom (2<sup>nd</sup> Monday a month)

Please do join me now in prayer and reflection

The apostle Paul says:

“For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith “(Eph 9,8)

## Prayer

Loving God,

We come to you today with trust and with doubts, with our questions and with our faith, knowing that faith and doubt belong together, knowing that our questions bring us closer to you and to your son, closer to our salvation.

Gracious God,

We give you thanks for your promise that you will never leave us nor forsake us, that you will be with us in this life and the next, that we can lift up our eyes, knowing that our help comes from you, the creator of heaven and earth.

We give you thanks for your son Jesus Christ who has walked with us on this earth as our comfort and our hope, who has taught us to love one another as you loved us, who loved us so much he was willing to die for us all on the cross.

We give you thanks for the apostles and disciples you sent into the world to spread the good news of your salvation, inspired and encouraged by the flame of your Holy Spirit, fearless and determined to bring salvation to us all.

Loving God,

We know that it is not always easy to live like your disciples lived, bound by your word alone, bound by love to you, to your son and to each other, too often are we distracted by worries and fear, by anger and disappointment, too often are we distracted by our own affairs, Father forgive.

We know that it is not always easy to spread the faith in you and in our salvation as you have asked us to, too often are we hindered by our doubts and our questions, too often do we lack faith and trust in you, Father, forgive,

Gracious Lord,

We know we have failed you in word and in deed and in what we have failed to do, but we also know that you have forgiven us through your son' sacrifice, and in this assurance, we pray as Jesus has taught us to pray:

Lord's Prayer

Our father, who art in heaven,

Hallowed be Thy name,

Thy kingdom come

Thy will be done on earth,

As it is in heaven.

Give us today our daily bread

and forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors

and lead us not into temptation

but deliver us from evil

for Thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. AMEN

## **READINGS**

### **Lesson 1: Psalm 30, 4-10**

Sing the praises of the Lord, you his faithful people; praise his holy name.

<sup>5</sup>For his anger lasts only a moment, but his favour lasts a lifetime; weeping may stay for the night but rejoicing comes in the morning.

<sup>6</sup>When I felt secure, I said "I will never be shaken."

<sup>7</sup>Lord, when you favoured me, you made my royal mountain<sup>[c]</sup> stand firm; but when you hid your face, I was dismayed.

To you, Lord, I called; to the Lord I cried for mercy:

<sup>9</sup>"What is gained if I am silenced, if I go down to the pit? Will the dust praise you? Will it proclaim your faithfulness?"

<sup>10</sup>Hear, Lord, and be merciful to me; Lord, be my help

### **Lesson 2: Acts 9,1-6**

Meanwhile, Saul was still breathing out murderous threats against the Lord's disciples. He went to the high priest <sup>2</sup>and asked him for letters to the synagogues in Damascus, so that if he found any there who belonged to the Way, whether men or women, he might take them as prisoners to Jerusalem. <sup>3</sup>As he neared Damascus on his journey, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. He fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?"

<sup>5</sup>"Who are you, Lord?" Saul asked. "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting," he replied. <sup>6</sup>"Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do."

## Reflection

We have not been able to commemorate the passing of HRH, Prince Philip last week- thus are the demands and practicalities of modern technology, that reflections and recordings are produced early in the week – and so we will take some time to think of his life today. Whether we would like to remember him by the Duke of Edinburgh award, that inspired and encouraged millions of young people of all backgrounds, by his environmentalism and patronage of the WWF, or by his 143 state visits and 22,000 official engagements during his lifetime, we are spoilt for choice. And if you do not happen to be an ardent royalist and his brusque remarks and gaffes that took more than one journalist or statesman by surprise come to your mind, then that is a facet of the Prince's life, too. Whatever you choose to remember him by, history books will of course mainly write about the Duke as the husband and support of her Majesty the Queen and the support he gave her is something we will all be able to relate to as we will all be able to relate to her grief at a time when grief and loss are a reality for so many. Much of the Duke's life, however, was shaped by tumultuous times and conflict, was not just private, was part of European and world history. His childhood and youth as a royal refugee and exile all over Europe, the palace officials' suspicious attitude towards his origins and the role he had to find for himself, the fact that he had to fight opposite his brothers- in -law during the war, all this made him the man he was as much as his love and loyalty to the Queen, his sense of duty and discipline in public life and his power to do good through his many charitable engagements in society. The Duke of Edinburgh's life was a remarkable one, it was not an easy life.

Of course, I am not saying that the Duke of Edinburgh's life had much to do with the life of St Paul, after all the two men were separated by time and space and circumstance, after all, none of us knew either of them in person, or at least I assume that this is the case, none of us can therefore judge the thoughts and feelings of either. One thing they

did have in common though: their lives were full of strife; their lives were not easy. And the difficulties of St Paul's life begin with today's reading. "As he neared Damascus on his journey, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. He fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" we read.

In whichever way we imagine this experience, it is not described as a pleasant one and I am not even talking of the blinding light or the voice that quite literally brought Paul to his knees in this account, I am talking about what must have been a crisis of identity, a shake-up of everything Paul has hitherto believed in. When he sets out to Damascus, Paul's attitude and intention towards the Christians there is less than charitable: "Meanwhile, Saul was still breathing out murderous threats against the Lord's disciples. He went to the high priest <sup>2</sup> and asked him for letters to the synagogues in Damascus, so that if he found any there who belonged to the Way, whether men or women, he might take them as prisoners to Jerusalem".

And now, on the way to Damascus everything is about to change, is turned upside down, all he ever believed in, his whole life called into question. That must have been a traumatic experience, an experience that would shape the apostle's life forever, would make it a lot more complicated and dangerous than it had hitherto been. Once the persecutor he would become the persecuted. He would endure shipwrecks, imprisonment, hunger and hardship.

He would be on the run and dependent on friends, although he loathed that, insisted that he could earn his keep, he would spend the rest of his life on the move and become one of the most ardent advocates for Christ.

And yet, his role within the Christian community was just as controversial and fraught with conflict, it seems, as his work as a missionary and apostle. His letters are full of frustration and anger at unruly congregations, especially in Corinth, he would fall out with

fellow apostles and send them packing, his tendency not to mince words did not always make him popular. St Paul is a controversial figure and remained so throughout his ministry. But maybe that is needed, maybe naysayers had a function for the survival of the first congregations, the early church, maybe they have a function in the church today. To be just on the side-lines, to be eager not to offend anyone, to sit on the fence may have its time and place, in the long run, it hinders progress, in the long run it keeps the church from doing the right thing and it can even create or tolerate evil, when perpetrators think they can get away with it, are not challenged.

It is not only a problem in the Roman Catholic church, that hurting each other in big and small ways, that bullying, that coercion, that even abuse were swept under the carpet, were covered with a blanket of prayer and silence, that for the victims insult was added to injury when they were silenced, when they were expected to forget and forgive, not because forgiveness is equally cathartic for victim and perpetrator but because it was and is convenient for the church on small and on large scales. Then we need people like St Paul, people who say how it is, who do not mince their word, who remind each and every member of God's word. Then we are called to speak out, to not be afraid, to not sit on the fence, then we are called to do the right thing by each other and by God.

Because God does the right thing by us, even if the church – consisting of fallible men and women - does not always do so. The psalmist in our Old Testament reading knows that, trusts in that, even if life is not easy at times, even if it appears that God has turned from him or from us, the psalmist knows that God is there:" When I felt secure, I said "I will never be shaken."<sup>7</sup> Lord, when you favoured me, you made my royal mountain<sup>[c]</sup> stand firm; but when you hid your face, I was dismayed." With this prayer the psalmist expresses his life experience, our life experience, human life experience. Sometimes we feel strong,

sometimes we feel as if all, even God have left us, we feel vulnerable exposed, alone.

That is normal, for all of us: life is not always easy, it is not meant to be, whether you are a Prince or a joiner or a homemaker, whether you live today or like St Paul, like the psalmist thousands of years ago. It is a universal human experience. What makes the psalmist unique, makes his experience more than human, is his trust in God: "To you, Lord, I called; to the Lord I cried for mercy" he prays and in this trust, he can be sure that:" weeping may stay for the night, but rejoicing comes in the morning". And if we can share the psalmist's faith, if we can share this trust, that God is there through good and bad, that in the end there will be rejoicing, then I believe we have the potential, then I believe we have the strength and the courage to do the right, by God and by each other. AMEN

### **Prayer of Intercession**

Loving God

In this difficult time, we give you thanks that you are near us in joy and in sorrow, wherever we go, whatever life brings to us. We give you thanks for the faith in you and in your son that heals and sustains us. And in gratitude for these our gifts we pray for those who find it hard to believe.

We will continue to pray for all who live in places of war and terror, of unrest and violence and today we think especially of the people of Myanmar, fighting peacefully and dying for their rights, for humanity for freedom.

Lord, have mercy

We will always pray for all who are affected by the cruel coronavirus pandemic all over the world, and we pray especially for the people in Brazil and Guatemala, in South Africa and Namibia, who wait desperately for the chance of a vaccine.

Lord, have mercy

Today we pray for all who have lost someone they love, for all who are grieving, and we remember especially the Royal Family who have lost a husband, father and grandfather who shaped them all and shaped this nation, may they find peace in you.

Lord, have mercy

We will continue to pray for all in our communities and in our congregations, for all who are ill and frail at home, in hospitals or in care homes, for all who worry about someone they love and cannot visit, for all who are lonely and isolated.

Lord, have mercy.

For all this we pray in Jesus' name. AMEN

### **Benediction**

And the God in whom we trust guard you and guide you in this coming week. And the almighty God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit be with us all, now and forevermore. AMEN