**Queen Elizabeth II: a Life of Grace and Wisdom**

**Address by the Archbishop of Wales, Andrew John**

We have come together this morning to give thanks to God for the life of Queen Elizabeth II. Here in Wales, we join with the whole United Kingdom, the Commonwealth and with people across the world, to grieve her passing. We remember her service and dedication. This was truly a life of grace and wisdom.

Today we recognize too the sorrow of our new King and his family. In their grief, we assure them of our love and care for them and of our prayers. It is an honour to welcome you here and to have been invited to host this service.

As we reflect on her life, we reach back across the ages. Her reign of 70 years and 214 days was the longest of any British monarch and the second-longest recorded of any monarch of a sovereign country. Today we honour an extraordinary legacy of service and devotion which is without equal in the history of our nation.

Across the country many have recognized the impact the late Queen had on our public life as well as in the lives of individuals; on how, from the earliest days, she transformed the monarchy bringing an accessibility to a country still emerging from the ravages of war. Her skills of diplomacy are well known but she had the ability to relate to the man/woman on the ‘Clapham Omnibus’ or perhaps the Merthyr Tydfil Omnibus – to the person on the street, with an attentiveness that made you feel you were understood and valued. Born, perhaps, of her experience as a mother, grandmother and great grandmother as much as Queen, this kind of skill is learned over decades and by interacting with life in all its joys and sorrows. When matched with the dignity of her office, it is lifted to a higher level still. A Christian word for this is grace.

The Queen shaped her role within a constitutional monarchy with its boundaries and responsibilities. Her ability to influence, to utilise ‘soft power’, no less significant, no less authoritative, illustrates the wise and careful thought she brought to her role. Prime Ministers found that she was a trusted and valued confident. Her attention to matters of government, her knowledge of world events and the longevity of her reign gave her an unmatched perspective and ability to see the distant scene.

This leadership was sustained across a time of enormous change – cultural, political and technological - but for us she offered grounds for confidence by focusing on things which endured. Her constancy in times of national challenge provided reassurance. This was never more so than when she broadcast a message to the nation during the pandemic.

We also saw a monarch who could surprise and delight us. We will never look at a jar of marmalade in the same way again nor watch Mr Bond without remembering 2012 and that leap into the void.

Her late Majesty was also a towering figure on the world stage, embodying stability and continuity but more than that, values which are shared across nations and cultures. She received countless Heads of State as well as innumerable Prime Ministers. It was her abiding trustworthiness as well as her hospitality which kindled friendship and confidence.

In her role as Head of the Commonwealth she presided over a growing fellowship of nations and she embraced our diverse histories, cultures and languages, delighting in the sheer variety of this unique assembly. At times when countries threatened to forsake each other, she displayed the skilful use of that ‘soft power’ which I mentioned earlier, that way of exercising power that has depth and reach.

In Wales that skill was never more evident than when she visited Aberfan in 1966. The community of Aberfan found her presence deeply consoling and her Majesty would return four more times to this community.

In one of our Bible readings we heard of Solomon’s request for the gift of wisdom at a time of significant change and transition: Solomon following David as king. As Wales gains an even stronger sense of nationhood and our place within the world, we should still remember that shared tradition counts. On St David’s Day (March 1) 2006, the Queen marked a new chapter in the life of our country when she opened the Senedd building. Our roots as a people are deep, our culture and language, stories and legends ground us in a unique heritage but also point us forward to a future with promise and potential. We need the grace and wisdom that the Queen exemplified as we work together to build a prosperous and compassionate society.

Finally, many of us will recall with gladness her deep and committed Christian faith which shaped her sense of duty and public service from as early as 1947 when she pledged her life to the service of God and the people. In celebrating her ninetieth birthday she reaffirmed the importance of her faith saying: “I have and remain very grateful to … God for his steadfast love. I have indeed seen His faithfulness.” Hers was a personal faith: she spoke of Jesus Christ and her relationship with him as well as his teachings and the way that his life, death and resurrection opened the possibility for new life, restored relationships and commitment to ‘a Kingdom not of this world’.

I end with her own words as she reflected on the meaning of Christmas for what turned out to be the last time. Having lost her beloved husband and yet having found consolation in the love and support shown to her from around the world she said: “It is this simplicity of the Christmas story that makes it so universally appealing, simple happenings that formed the starting point of the life of Jesus — a man whose teachings have been handed down from generation to generation and have been the bedrock of my faith. His birth marked a new beginning. As the carol says: ‘The hopes and fears of all the years are met in thee tonight.’

We thank God for this faith and this life, full of grace and wisdom.

Amen.