

St Nicholas Parish Church, Prestwick

The Thought for the Week

Sunday 5th September 2021

It was a delight for us all when we had some of the children of the Sunday School back in Church at the first service last week. After an enforced absence of some nineteen months, during which time our young folk had held their meetings by Zoom, it was so encouraging to see their return along with their teachers – it gave me the opportunity to introduce myself to them and have a word with them before they went off to their activities in the Hall.

Then, two weeks before, we had the joy of seeing the Choir back in their places in the Choir Stalls at both morning services, and we all appreciated hearing them lead the praise. Isobel is always on the lookout for new recruits, so if you enjoy singing, then please speak to her as you will be a valued asset in the worship of the sanctuary.

Bit by bit, week by week, in spite of the ongoing Pandemic and its attendant problems, we are beginning to see some kind of normal life again. I realise that it will be quite a while yet before all our restrictions are lifted, but, for the time being, it is a most welcome start.

Back in November 2019 I had the unexpected accolade of being appointed a Deputy Lieutenant of Ayrshire and Arran. This was an honour which I embraced wholeheartedly as I am avowed Monarchist. When the invitation came, and all the due checks were made, I had to wait for several weeks before it became public and the announcement was made in the London Gazette and a couple of national newspapers.

Then, of course, four months later, everything went into Lockdown and all official duties ceased! How disappointed I was – I had only had the privilege of presenting one Telegram from The Queen to a lovely couple in Irvine who were celebrating their Diamond Wedding Anniversary.... then, no more, up until a few weeks ago, when I was charged with delivering the Congratulations of Her Majesty to a couple here in Prestwick who were marking their sixty fifth wedding anniversary.

This week I have the most pleasant duty of representing The Queen when I present 10 Queen's Badges to members of the 1st Alloway Company of the Boys' Brigade at a special ceremony in the Church there and extending the congratulations of The Queen to them.

When my appointment was made, I was asked whether I would wear the ceremonial uniform, but after much consideration, I have made the decision simply to wear the splendid badge of honour. The thought of travelling down for fittings to Haworth in Yorkshire three or four times to the factory where the uniform is made did not really fill me with excitement!

Anyhow, I had heard numerous humorous stories spawned by those Lieutenancy uniforms!

On one occasion The Queen was accompanied by the Lord Lieutenant of Lanark, Lord Clydesmuir. Arriving at the start of the visit, with the line of dignitaries waiting to be presented, she was disconcerted to note that he appeared to be stuck in his seat in the car, wrestling with his sword which had got caught in the upholstery. As ever, a past master in coping with such unexpected situations, The Queen approached the first person in the line with the words, "My Lord Lieutenant appears to be having difficulty in getting out of the car, so I had better introduce myself. I'm The Queen."

There was the occasion when the Duke of Wellington, Lord Lieutenant of Hampshire called on some close friends whilst dressed in ceremonial garb, and the normally friendly dog attacked him viciously, mistaking him for the postman.

So, I will just stick to sporting the ceremonial badge!

The Lord Lieutenants and their Deputies, it is written, should be “approachable and ready to listen rather than talk and, above all, not be grand or pompous.” They have been described as “a body of unusual people in the eve of their careers, who agree to take on an office for which they are not paid and, indeed might be out of pocket, but eventually are allowed to retire at the age of seventy-five”, which is maybe just as well. Several years ago, the Marquis of Aberdeen, Lord Lieutenant of Aberdeenshire, a charming but rather muddled and forgetful man, then in his 80th year, became confused when greeting the Royal Family at the Braemar Highland Games. He attempted to introduce the Queen to the Queen Mother, and to the Queen, he said, “And what are you up to these days?” “Oh, still Queen,” she replied.

There are 35 Lieutenancies in Scotland, and the first duty of all those who hold office is to “uphold the dignity of the Crown and to seek to promote a good atmosphere and spirit of co-operation, especially through the encouragement of voluntary service and benevolent activity.”

The Lord Lieutenant and his or her deputies take the lead in arranging Royal visits – this is a huge task, involving detailed timings, reconnaissance, security, the route and ordering of the royal convoy, protocol, presentations, media coverage and the provision of background information. Nothing is left to chance.

Inevitably, the unexpected sometimes happens.

There was the occasion when The Queen was lunching in Trinity College in Oxford, on an official visit, and the Lord Mayor fainted, as did his wife, who thought he was dead. An aged College servant with a heavy tray then tripped up and went crashing to the floor. Repairing to the Junior Common Room after the lunch, the Queen confided to the Lord Lieutenant, the Earl of Macclesfield, “We have had a wonderful lunch; there were bodies all over the place!”

Part of my role as a Deputy is to be the “eyes and ears” of the Lord Lieutenant. From Deputies come views on those whose names are put forward for honours; nominations for the Royal Garden parties; and representing the Lieutenancy at Civic functions such as Armistice Parades.

Representing the Monarch. A high privilege indeed.

And that, quite simply, is the role of every Christian man and woman – we are representative of the King of Kings. We go in His stead and honour His Name in whatever ways we can.

Our present Queen has a very strong faith in Jesus as her Lord and Saviour and that faith has been the foundation of her reign these past seventy years. She sees herself as His servant, His representative, His ambassador, and it is so obvious in many of her Christmas broadcasts just how much she relies on His teachings in her own life. Have you ever watched Her Majesty when she has been present at a service of worship in Westminster Abbey and as the television cameras pan over the Royal Family during the singing of a congregational hymn, the Queen is singing without looking at the words? They are written on her heart.

She is indeed the Servant Queen.

The Revd Fraser R Aitken, Locum Minister