

May I speak in the name of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

Next Thursday would have been the hundredth birthday of the Duke of Edinburgh. Here, in St George's Chapel, we should no doubt have celebrated the occasion with a special service. As it is, it is in the course of an ordinary Sunday Mattins that, quietly and unobtrusively, we mark the hundredth anniversary of Prince Philip's birth.

This is not an occasion for eulogy or detailed retrospect, and certainly, he would not have wished for such. However, it could be that there is something to be gleaned from one of the set readings for the day that will prove to be appropriate; somehow resonate.

From our second lesson, that from the writings of St Paul, I select just five words: "We do not lose heart".

In spite of innumerable troubles and personal affliction, Paul had faith in the future. That faith was rooted in the promise, implicit in the resurrection of Jesus, that God's love is bound to prevail. So, says St Paul, "We do not lose heart."

Down through the centuries, that primary resurrection conviction has comforted countless Christian people in their pain and bewilderment. It has given reassurance to us that, in spite of all we might be forced to bear, there is a love that will never let us go; will never abandon us. Therefore, though there may be many troubles, "We do not lose heart".

That primary belief has also been a challenge to us. If the love of God really is to have the final word, if love is to be our destiny (the destiny of this world and, indeed, in some mysterious way, the destiny of the whole creation) perhaps we are called to be instruments of that love, working to and for that end. Unnumbered Christian men and women have accepted the challenge and have given of their all to make this world a kinder and a more just place; a little more in tune with the end for which it is destined. They have often met with antagonism and opposition, yet, because of that primary conviction, they have been able to say, "We do not lose heart".

I dare say that, in the course of his almost one hundred years, Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh was faced with a host of difficulties; had to endure many setbacks. Yet there is no doubt that he understood the primary Christian conviction, that God's love will surely prevail, to be not only a comfort but also a challenge to him. His eyes were ever focussed on a better future to which he might contribute; his mind always exploring ways in which that future might be brought to birth. At every stage along the way, it is as if he was saying to the rest of us, "We do not lose heart"

It is important that we do not hear those words as an invitation simply to grit our teeth and, maybe even grudgingly, to get on with things in a stubborn sort of way.

Neither should we hear them as an invitation to adopt false optimism or forced and affected cheerfulness.

We should hear them as words emerging out of deep and abiding faith, rooted in the primary Christian conviction that God's love, expressed in and through the life, death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ, will endure and prevail. These words, "We do not lose heart", are words of gratitude and joy.

For all that however, there will be times for most of us when faith falters; seems very fragile. We can be knocked off balance by the unexpected trials that life brings to us. When that happens, when our faith ebbs and the vision of God's love in Christ seems to fade, it is as if we are diminished; something that we had felt to be of the essence of our humanity is lost.

That, I suppose, is why we need each other; need to remember that we are not alone. There are times when all we can do is to rest in the shared faith of the Christian community; be somehow 'carried' by our fellow Christians for a while; be supported and encouraged by the Church.

It frequently happens that faith returns, and that we rediscover both its comfort and its challenge. We are assured once more. that we are loved with a love that will never let us go, and we are challenged once again to work (as Prince Philip did so tirelessly) to make the world a better place – a place more loved and lovely.

We might then, once more, contribute to that chorus that has sounded through the Christian centuries – those words of gratitude and joy: "We do not lose heart."

