

16th April 2021

Example

“Example is better than precept.”

Proverb, Early 15th Century

Tomorrow sees the funeral of His Royal Highness Prince Philip, the Duke of Edinburgh, who died last week, a few weeks short of his one hundredth birthday. Much has been said about this remarkable figure in our modern history that doesn't need to be repeated here. But such is the significance of this death that I cannot let it go past without a personal comment.

Two things have impacted on me. The first is from Gyles Brandreth, a biographer of the Duke of Edinburgh, who spoke movingly of the Queen's faith and Prince Philip's spiritual life. "She will be sustained," he said, "as she has been in so much of her life, by her faith in God and her belief that she and her husband will be reunited one day." Today I pray that this widow, after more than seventy years of marriage, will find peace in her loss, holding to the promise of Jesus in the Beatitudes:

Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.

And the second comes from Her Royal Highness, the Princess Royal. Among tributes from many family members, Princess Anne, the second of Prince Philip and Queen Elizabeth's children, wrote this last weekend:

*My father has been my teacher, my supporter and my critic,
but mostly it is his example of a life well lived and service freely given
that I most wanted to emulate.*

A wonderful tribute! The Princess Royal clearly knows the rightness of the 15th century proverb quoted above. Example is always better than precept. If someone sets us a standard we want to emulate, how much more meaningful is that than any set of instructions or behavioural constraints?

An "example of a life well lived." What comfort that also gives those who mourn the loss of a loved one – someone who has made the best of their life and whose service has been freely given. *Requiescat in Pace.*

A prayer of commendation

Encircle us with your power, encompass us with your grace, embrace your dying ones, support your weary ones, calm your frightened ones – and as the sun scatters the mist on the hills, bring us to new dawn, when we shall sit at a table in your kingdom, rejoicing in a God who saves his people. Amen

From "A New Dawn" in *The Green Heart of the Snowdrop* by Kate McIlhagga