30th June 2026

Dignity

"Remember this – that there is a proper dignity and proportion to be observed in the performance of every act of life."

Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations*

Watching the State Opening of Parliament in the middle of May – in the midst, it should be remembered, of an apparent crisis for the Prime Minister and a perceived instability of government – I was struck by the dignity of the occasion. In contrast with the turmoil of such events in past history, here was dignity personified. From the delivery of the King's speech, to the care and attention of the page-boys; from the summoning by Black Rod of the members of the Commons to "attend the House of Peers", to the casual conversations of the MPs as they entered and left the House of Lords … dignity prevailed. And, indeed, when we recall the debacles, intemperate language and physical violence in some other legislative bodies in recent times, I was pleased to know that dignity still mattered in UK politics – at least when the rest of the world is watching.

Dignity matters. I remember Willie Simpson, the Superintendent at an Edinburgh crematorium in my early years in ministry, being one of the most dignified men I've met. Immaculately turned out, his back ramrod straight, his movements careful and composed, his dignity brought an aura of calmness to the mourners who came and went – and to ministers and priests too. I recall Alec Davidson from Loanhead being the most dignified funeral director I've worked with. When I was with Alec, his dignified reassurance communicated to everyone that they would be in good hands. And I give thanks for Willie Burnside, a minister for over forty years and my wise and loving father-in-law, supremely dignified in the conduct of his ministry: his leading of worship; professional and personal conversations; quiet assurance, offered with care and compassion. All of this made his dignified presence both helpful and memorable.

We may have differing views, but we can disagree with dignity. We may be facing a crisis, but dignity can be a calming and reassuring component. We may have stressful responsibilities, but presenting ourselves with dignity is vital in how we deal with other people and might well be what we need for our own welfare and peace of mind.

A prayer for today

Lord, give me the wisdom to act with dignity, for everyone's benefit, including mine.

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