



*Westminster Cathedral, 7 May 2023, 12 noon*

My brothers and sisters, in the wake of yesterday's remarkable and historic coronation of King Charles III, today we pray for him. Being King is not easy. Think of the unending, high expectations that are placed on him. Think of the relentless intrusion he has to bear. Think of the criticism that is constantly offered, and then of the crises through which he will be expected to provide leadership. So we pray for him today.

There are three aspects in the readings that correspond to aspects of the coronation ceremony. You might remember that the first words that King Charles spoke when he entered the Abbey were, "I come not to be served, but to serve." For some, it's easy to be cynical when we hear those words from a person of such privilege. But it is, I believe, his sincere intention. It's his way of echoing the priorities of his mother, and understanding the scope, responsibility and power which he has – he is there to serve.

In the first reading, we heard of the importance of service in the life of the Early Church, when the apostles were being put under pressure by divisions between the Hebrews and the Greeks, and people were saying, "we're not getting our fair share of help." So deacons were appointed to put love into action, in service. It was the response of the Early Church, that service offered in love overcomes division and hostility. That can apply in society as a whole and within the circles of our own families.

I remember listening to a wise leader of the Sikh community in Birmingham. People often brought their family difficulties to him seeking advice. "When I am faced with a husband and wife who are rowing constantly," he said. "I say to them, 'before you go to sleep at night, you must wash each other's feet.'" A Sikh calling on that wonderful example of Christ which was echoed again in the Coronation ceremony. So we can make our own that sense of service in our lives, too.

The second aspect comes from the First Letter of St Peter, that we have just heard, and Peter's appeal to us, "Set yourself close to Christ." There were many ways in which that was symbolised

in the ancient rituals of the Coronation service. We had the period of silent prayer at the beginning; the moment when the King kissed the Bible, and then his personal prayer, said out loud, begging God that he be a blessing on all people.

Then, of course, his anointing and robing, before the blessing, of which I was privileged to play a part. Followed by the Eucharist. In all these ways, the King was being placed close to Christ. He echoes the faith of his mother, Queen Elizabeth II, who year after year spoke to us of how Christ was at the foundation of her life.

These are words for us too. Let us set ourselves close to Christ in those same ways. In our reverence for the Word of God, the Scriptures, in our daily practise of prayer, first thing in the morning and last thing at night. In our sharing in public prayer, in the circle of our family life, and in centring our lives on the Mass, on the sacrifice of Christ and receiving his precious body and blood.

The third aspect comes from today's Gospel. The Coronation has been spoken of as a day of destiny for Charles. It is true, from birth he was destined for this moment. The Coronation is the start, an ongoing part of the King's destiny.

Yet, at work here is a larger sense of destiny. Faith is a clear statement, a shining truth, that our destiny is a place in our Father's House. That is our destiny. And Jesus says there is a place for each of us in that house. He assures us that our fulfilment is there, and that our lives, in his hands, will find that full and final destiny. Our lives, the life of the whole world, are being drawn in an upward movement to fulfilment, fulfilment in our Father's House.

Also in this Gospel passage, in a slightly mysterious way, we learn that that destiny starts now, here. Because, as Jesus says, 'to see me is to already see the Father'. To share life with Jesus is already to have begun eternal life. There is a unity between the Father and the Son, and in him we are offered our way, our truth and our life.

It is with this sense of destiny that we strive to overcome our daily difficulties and to grow in trust in the pathway of faith, in our beloved Saviour: a pathway of being close to Christ, of knowing our destiny and of being of service to all. This is so important, it is our trust and joy, for king and for commoner exactly alike.

**Amen.**

*HE Vincent Cardinal Nichols*