



THE ARCHBISHOP
OF YORK

The Archbishop led a meditation on BBC Radio 4 on the eve of the funeral of HRH The Duke of Edinburgh. His reflection follows in full.

When I was a young man, contemplating whether God might be calling me to serve as a priest in the Church of England, I was anxious how I could minister to those who were dying and those who were bereaved and – like many people – wondering how a loving God could make a world where there is so much suffering.

In order to face this fear, and see if I could navigate my way through it with my faith intact, my parish priest challenged me to go and work among the dying for a year. So I ended up at St. Christopher's Hospice in South London, and, for about a year, worked as a ward orderly, mopping floors and making tea and with time to get to know and be alongside those who were dying and those who sat with them through those hours of vigil that precede death.

And what did I learn?

Well, I learned about living.

I learned how it is possible to live and to love right up until the point of death.

I learned that holding someone's hand was more precious and more valuable than words.

I also found that God was present: present in the skill and care of the medical staff; present in the attendance of loved ones who watched and prayed and held hands; and present even in the tea trolley and all the little conversations I enjoyed with those who were dying and approaching death with such fortitude – people who often calmed my fears much more than I calmed theirs.

The saddest thing I saw when I worked there, was a group of very earnest Christians gathered around the bedside of their friend who was very close to death and demanding of God a reprieve or a miracle or a bit more time.

And the greatest thing I saw – and I saw it over and over again – was people placing themselves and placing their loved ones in the hands of God and making their own the prayer that Jesus offered in his hour of death: 'Father, into your hands I place my spirit.'

We are all going to die one day.

On that day, I don't want to fight against death. Nor do I want to try to cut a deal with God so that I can have a few more days.

I want there to be thanksgiving in my heart for all the joys of life and I want to place myself in the hands of God.

And isn't this what we are doing this evening as a nation, remembering someone whose life and service has been so part of our national life and of the story of our nation for nearly 100 years?

We give thanks. We remember. We place him – as we place ourselves and all our loved ones who have died – into the hands of God.

Of course this will mean tears. Like holding hands, tears are the most eloquent sign of our love. But through these tears of love and tears of sadness there is also thanksgiving: for lives well led; for the hope that we have in Christ; and for the comfort and hope that we can give each other.

So let us pray this night for all who mourn, and especially for Her Majesty the Queen and all the Royal Family for whom this bereavement is the death of a husband, father, grandfather, great-grandfather, friend: Into your hands, O Lord, we commit his spirit.

And for those of us left behind and still to die, comfort us with the presence of your Son Jesus Christ who shared our life on earth, who died and rose again and has prepared a place in glory for those who love him.

Amen.

You can listen to the meditation in full at [BBC Radio 4](#)



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