

In the name of ✝ Jesus.

Jesus said, *“So you also, when you have done all that you were commanded, say, ‘We are unworthy servants; we have only done what was our duty.’”*

Duty ... obligation ... responsibility ... honor ... integrity. What would you call these things today? Anachronistic? Old-fashioned?

After all, who praises duty today ... obligation? Who teaches responsibility? Who makes integrity an expectation? Who encourages the sacrifices—the giving up of what is expedient—often necessary to live a life of honor?

The military does. It’s a theme in the movie “A Few Good Men” starring Tom Cruise and Jack Nicholson. It’s a courtroom drama in which a hot-shot military lawyer, played by Cruise, had to learn the meaning of honor, duty, courage, integrity as he went up against powerful people to defend his clients. In the end, he did, and he reminded the sergeant whom he defended: “You don’t need to wear a patch on your arm to have honor.”

And you don’t need to be in the military to learn honor, duty ... to have integrity. We teach it ... we expect it ... at LSUS. You can ask Mrs. Bahr about it. I mention it in this month’s Voice. “RISE UP” is the LSUS way, and the first two letters of that acronym stand for “respect” and “integrity.” Doing one’s duty is a part of being a person of integrity, I think.

Did you watch much of the coverage of Elizabeth II’s death and funeral? I know ... she was not our sovereign, but the British do do ceremony very well. I watched a lot of the coverage. In hearing about the Queen, for me, one of the words that was often used to describe her was “duty.” She was devoted to duty, something she promised at the age of 21: “I declare before you all that my whole life, whether it be long or short, shall be devoted to your service and the service of our great imperial family to which we all belong” (Speech on her 21st birthday, April 21, 1947, broadcast on the radio from Cape Town, www.standard.co.uk/insider/royals/inspirational-moving-quotes-queen-elizabeth-ii-b102).

The Queen was commendable in that, and she was commended as one who served. “Rarely has such a promise [to serve] been so well kept,” preached the Archbishop of Canterbury at the Queen’s funeral. “Her service to so many people ... had its foundation in her following Christ – God himself – who said that he ‘came not to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many’” (premierchristian.news/en/news/article/full-text-of-the-archbishop-of-canterbury-s-sermon-at-queen-s-funeral). It was a crumb. So much more could have been said about Christ’s selfless service, but the focus was on the Queen. Certainly her service was commendable, but a such a focus offered little comfort to

the grieving royal family in the face of Jesus' words today: "*when you have done all that you were commanded, say, 'We are unworthy servants; we have only done what was our duty.'*"

To be sure, the sermon wasn't completely void of comfort: "Christian hope means certain expectation of something not yet seen," the Archbishop preached. "Christ rose from the dead and offers life to all, abundant life now and life with God in eternity." And he mentioned the Queen's "hope," but he didn't say how she acquired this hope. He didn't explore at all her faith in Jesus that inspired this hope. He didn't explore the God "*who saved us [meaning also the Queen] ... not because of our works but because of his own purpose and grace*" manifested in the incarnate Son of God, crucified and risen from the dead. And even though this God also calls "*us to a holy calling,*" the Archbishop didn't explore the true righteousness that comes by faith not by works, not even one's duty. Rather, he quickly turned back to the Queen's service: "We will all face the merciful judgment of God: we can all share the Queen's hope which in life and death inspired her servant leadership." And apparently this hope for us comes from following "the Queen's example" ... of duty, I think he meant, and not of faith.

But in fact, the Queen had a robust faith in Christ, as I understand it. An article published about a year before her death mentioned a book written "for her 90th birthday ... entitled *The Servant Queen and the King She Serves.*" That King is Christ! She wrote the forward to the book. The article stated: "The book carefully noted, 'Many commentators have noted the depth of her trust in God but few have explored it'" (Gavin Ashenden, 25 Oct. 2021, www.christiantoday.com/article/the.queen.and.her.christian.faith/137625.htm). The Archbishop didn't either. Nevertheless, her faith was evident in the service that she herself reportedly put together. That funeral service bore witness to a confident faith in the Lord Jesus Christ that led her to do her duty.

But this call to duty is one to which all the faithful have been called, for we who hope in the Lord's salvation are also called to love His law and do His commandments. And yet "*this holy calling*" is difficult, Jesus reminds us, even impossible. It is impossible for temptations that cause us to stumble not to come. Today especially we are tempted to cast aside our holy calling and focus on ourselves; we are tempted to cast aside "self-giving duty, honour, sacrifice and virtue," which is hard and narrow, and instead focus on self: "self-indulgence, self-development, self-expression, and moral relativity," which is wide and easy. It's "an abandonment of humble Christian spirituality in favour of a secular narcissism" (Ashenden).

And that's bad enough, Jesus says, but when we become the cause of others to stumble and fall, that's even worse. Jesus says, "*It would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck and he were cast into the sea than that he should*

cause one of these little ones to sin.” Here it seems that Jesus is speaking more generally than He does in Matthew (18:2-6) when He sets a child in the midst of the disciples. Here there is no indication that there are any children around, and Jesus is likely talking about weak and vulnerable Christians generally. That’s a rather frightening warning to us all!

Moreover, it is our duty as Christians to forgive as we have been forgiven by Christ. That, too, is difficult to do. Our flesh balks at that, but that’s what Jesus teaches us to do. *“If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him, and if he sins against you seven times in the day, and turns to you seven times, saying, ‘I repent,’ you must forgive him.”* Seven times in ONE day? You recall again in Matthew (18:21-22) how Peter asked Jesus if seven times might be the maximum number of times to forgive someone, and Jesus told him not just seven but seventy times seven. It’s no wonder the disciples cried out to Jesus, saying: *“increase our faith.”* Doing this kind of duty requires faith.

Although Jesus says, it really doesn’t take much ... only have *“faith like a grain of mustard seed,”* and you can do marvelous things, for you will be *“in Christ,”* who knew something about doing His duty. Dutifully, He came down from the Father’s side to be with us, taking on our flesh. Dutifully, Jesus went about the Father’s business (Luke 2:49), speaking and teaching what the Father had given Him (John 8:28, 12:49). Dutifully, Jesus went to the cross to suffer and die in obedience (Phil. 2:8); dutifully, He drank our cup of woe because it was the Father’s will (Matt. 26:39, 42). Jesus did His duty for us, because we, even if we could do our duty perfectly, doing all that we were commanded, would still be *“unworthy servants.”*

For our worthiness comes from faith, as the prophet says: *“the righteous shall live by his faith”*—and as St Paul repeats and the writer to the Hebrews. Paul reminds us that *“to the one who works, his wages are not counted as a gift but as his due”* (Rom. 4:4)—nothing but his duty. But faith is a gift from God, and by it we are accounted righteous and are saved. It was so for Abraham, as St. Paul reminds us: *“what does the Scripture say? ‘Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness’”* (Rom. 4:3). And, he says, what was true for Abraham is also true for us, who believe in Jesus Christ, the crucified and risen (Rom. 4:23-25). We, too, are accounted righteous and worthy by faith. From this faith, then, we do our duty, the Lord ever increasing our faith by Word and Sacraments to do it.

It’s not anachronistic; it’s not old-fashioned. It’s our duty as Christians. God grant us this faith and the daily strength to be about our *“holy calling”* of love and service to others.

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit.