



## CATHOLIC ARCHDIOCESE OF SYDNEY

**06 February 2012**

### **DIAMOND JUBILEE OF THE CORONATION OF QUEEN ELIZABETH II**

**ST JAMES CHURCH, SYDNEY 06/2/2012**

The succession of awful earthquakes in Christchurch has demonstrated to us the power of the conflicting forces at work beneath the regularly peaceful surface of the globe. Tectonic plates are slowly crushing into one another above the molten core of our planet. These subterranean physical realities constitute a parallel for many areas of human life.

The world wide system of markets has produced unprecedented wealth, but the system has to be inherently unstable (because it is run by humans) and implodes at irregular intervals.

In other areas too trouble is not far below the surface, which is why every country has a police force and usually an army.

In other parts of the world they are plagued with violence as the persecution of Christians in many countries demonstrates. The violence of the Arab Spring threatens to drag many, or perhaps all of these countries into a long undemocratic winter and another round of war with Israel. China has endemic local civic disturbances.

The people involved in this suffering are not another species, like the Neanderthals; they are our sisters and brothers, with hearts and minds, bodies and souls, the gift of free will like we do. Their problems might be ours.

As we celebrate the Diamond Jubilee of Elizabeth II, Queen of Australia, the bleak background I outlined helps us to avoid taking our blessings for granted. We cannot presume that the values and virtues we cherish will be maintained automatically and passed onto the next generations undiminished. For this, a community needs leaders who will work hard, possess a sense of duty, are able to lead wisely; and they need a community who knows the music so they can join the singing.

The Australian system of government works well, because it regularly meets all these criteria and the Queen has also played her part well. This year we celebrate her sixty years of achievement, ably supported by Prince Philip. She embodies many of the values we aspire to share. She knows the duties she has inherited, the tasks she must perform as a constitutional monarch, in our case, through the Governor General and I repeat, she has done well.

Therefore as one of the guarantors of our governing authority, and its proper exercise and as a democratic symbol who is subject to God's authority, we give Queen Elizabeth the honour and respect which is her due.

It does not seem sixty years since those pre-television days in Australia when we followed her coronation in Westminster Abbey, that ancient Christian shrine rededicated and restored by King Edward the Confessor in 1065 and now a repository of history for Britain and indeed the English-speaking world. Although we could only follow by radio, newsreels, newspapers and magazines, there was probably even more interest in the coronation than in the recently televised wedding ceremony of the Duke and Duchess of Cambridge; and that generated huge audiences around the world.

In our Judaeo-Christian tradition Saul was anointed King of the Israelite federation by Samuel the priest more than 1000 years before Christ. Roman Emperors and Christian Kings continued this monarchical tradition everywhere until the French revolutions from 1789, the communist revolution in Russia in 1917 and two world Wars reduced the number of monarchies in the old world. In the new world of the Americas they too followed other paths, except for Canada.

But these thousands of years of monarchical history explain why the position of kings and queens, even more than the concept of bishop, is embedded in the Western psyche. That such an ancient and evocative institution also serves our nation's practical purposes well helps explain the re-endorsement of the role of the British monarchy in Australian life in the referendum of 1999. It was also an expression of the respect and affection Australians have for the Queen personally. Any new system needs to be better.

This celebration of the Diamond Jubilee of the Queen of Australia reminds us that of the British monarchs only Queen Victoria has reigned for longer; a considerable achievement.

This jubilee also points to some elemental truths about ourselves, as Australians, which are often studiously avoided or dismissed as irrelevant.

The first truth is that Australia is a distant outpost of European civilization on the south-eastern extremity of Asia. Migrants of every background continue to be welcome here and most of them come, not merely to benefit their children, but because our society is a haven of peace and widespread, if imperfect justice. They find our constitutional arrangements attractive.

It is an interesting possibility that if the twenty-first century sees the continued rise of China and India to super-power status (and this is by no means certain) the link with the British royals might also continue to be asserted to define our European identity, just as the English-speaking Canadians rally around the Crown to assert that they are different from their United States neighbours.

Elizabeth was anointed and crowned in a spectacular and dignified Christian ceremony which drew on centuries of tradition. She is head of the Church of England and carries the title of Defender of the Faith, first given to her predecessor Henry VIII by Pope Leo X in 1521.

In an age of increasing but still minority secularism the Queen prompts us to remember the Judaeo-Christian roots of our way of life, which give us Christmas and Easter, which define Australian "common sense", the insistence of "a fair go for everyone" and our sympathy for the underdog. She also reminds us that nearly two-thirds of Australians call themselves Christian.

In Australia we practise a substantial separation of Church and State and acknowledging the majority identification as Christian implies no threat to the irreligious or indeed anti-religious, who have the same freedoms as we do to influence public opinion.

The Queen's reign has seen immense changes ranging as it does from Sir Robert Menzies and Sir Winston Churchill to Julia Gillard and David Cameron. Unlike George III she did not lose the Americas but she has presided over the transition from the British Empire to the British Commonwealth. The winds of change blew through English-speaking Africa as they had blown through India soon after the Second World War. She saw the peaceful fall of Communism and the collapse of the Soviet Empire, which came as such a surprise to most of our commentariat. She has seen the creation of the Common Market and the European Union.

As she continues her years of service we pray that God will not fail or forsake her, that she will remain strong and courageous and that she will always act "in accordance with all that is written" in the sacred Books.

In other words we pray that the one true God, our Lord and God, will be with her wherever she goes.

✠ George Cardinal Pell

Archbishop of Sydney