

The Diamond Jubilee of Elizabeth II - 60 years of service

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6 February 2012 was a day of both sad reflection and celebration for millions of Britons, as well as the citizens of 15 other countries around the world that count Queen Elizabeth as their Head of State. Sadness, because on that day, 60 years ago, His Majesty King George VI died, quietly, in his sleep at his house at Sandringham in Norfolk in the East of England. His daughter, the twenty five year old Princess Elizabeth, was not with her father in his last moments. As throughout her life, she was fulfilling her duty, undertaking a tour of the British Empire at the request of the King. She was only to hear of her father's death when she was woken up at her residence in Kenya later that day.



I joined others at All Saints' Anglican Church in Rome on 6 February to commemorate the Princess Elizabeth's sad loss at a Requiem on the 60th anniversary of the death of King George VI. But later that day, I attended a very different service in the same Church; a Te Deum of Thanksgiving for the Accession of that young Princess Elizabeth to the throne of the United Kingdom and other countries as Queen Elizabeth II, and for her 60 subsequent years of unstinting service to the peoples of Britain, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and the other

countries of which she is Queen. In her broadcast speech from Cape Town to mark her twenty-first birthday on 21 April 1947, Princess Elizabeth set the tone that would mark her future reign. “I declare before you all”, she said, “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”. She has been as good as her word, and this year, we shall celebrate The Queen’s Diamond Jubilee with pride and with pleasure.



Queen Victoria is the only other monarch in the history of Britain to have celebrated a Diamond jubilee, in 1897. Like Queen Elizabeth II, her reign saw great changes in Britain, as both the constitutional and physical landscape of the country was transformed. In 2012, at a time of change, uncertainty and crisis in Europe, celebration of the Diamond Jubilee will be for many an opportunity to celebrate not only a remarkable Queen, but also a remarkable institution, the British monarchy, that has evolved with modernity, adapted to democracy, and has stood the test of time and history. The Queen has combined her position as monarch with other, no less important roles, not least those of Supreme Governor of the Church of England, and as Head of the Commonwealth of Nations of 54 independent sovereign states.



6 February will be the solemn start of nationwide and global

festivities that culminate over the weekend of 2-5 June, with a pageant on the River Thames in London that will evoke another great Queen, Elizabeth I, as over 1,000 boats take to the waters following The Queen in her Royal Barge, the largest flotilla for over 350 years. The Queen and other Members of the Royal Family will spend much of the year traveling, in the United Kingdom and overseas, meeting and greeting countless numbers of people who wish Her Majesty well in this special year. And the celebrations will continue in London during the summer, when London hosts the 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games for an unprecedented third time.

On 13 February 1952, Winston Churchill wrote to a friend: “We have sustained a terrible loss in the death of King George VI, who was a devoted and tireless servant of this country, and these are sad days indeed. But I am sure that in his daughter we have one who is in every way able to bear the heavy burden she must now carry.” 6 February 1952 was indeed a day of sadness. But as Churchill divined, the British people that day lost one great servant, and gained another. And that we celebrate with all our heart.

Nigel Marcus Baker, Ambassador of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland to the Holy See February 7, 2012

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