

St Olave's Sermon, Easter Three, 18 April 2021 - Canon Dr Malcolm Grundy

I do not think that I ever had a one-to-one conversation with Prince Philip. If I had I would have been sure to remember. There have been several occasions in the kind of life I have led when I have stood in line at a reception or party when he and Her Majesty the Queen have walked past. What I can remember are the few church services I have been a part when he was present. I recall the Royal Maundy service in Bradford Cathedral. Then and probably on every Maundy he read the lesson. It was very clear that he had prepared and understood the words he was reading. We have heard of his enquiring Christian faith and that he took notes of sermons and at Sandringham interrogated (I nearly said grilled) the visiting preacher over lunch. That is one reason why a particular sentence in today's gospel stands out for me: *Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures,*

I choose this verse also for another reason. Just a few days before the death of Prince Philip one of the 'theologian princes' of the church died - though, equally, he would resent such a title. Professor Hans Küng died on April 6th aged 93. As a young priest he was one of the leading theologians in the wings at the Second Vatican Council. He went on to a life of considerable controversy as he tried to bring modernising reforms into the Catholic Church. He was a prolific writer and speaker. Among many contributions, he brought the study of the Bible more closely into his church. That is why in word and action both recently departed reformers and influencers lead us to that text, *Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures.*

What is interesting both about Hans Küng and Prince Philip is that they grew to have an overwhelming concern for the preservation of the natural world and the land. One commentator has said that as people of faith they saw that the land around holy places was regarded as sacred and consequently all the earth should be treated with the same reverence.

Now we have lost Shirley Williams. There was a great moment in York Minster after her Ebor Lecture when in questions she commented that, as a practicing Catholic, it can be hard to see the aims of the founder in her and other churches. If anyone 'opened minds to further understanding' it was Shirley Williams.

Both of our readings today were from the writing of St Luke. He was in a particular position. We think he was a doctor, but the word actually used for him was healer. Today we have heard his particular contribution to opening minds. There is a continuing debate about whether he was a gentile writing for a gentile audience or that Luke-Acts is directed to a community made up of both Jewish and gentile Christians because there is stress on the scriptural roots of the gentile mission.

All of those I mention were reconcilers. Mary McAleese, the former President of the Irish Republic was asked about Prince Philip, the Queen, and the murder of Lord Mountbatten. She said that the attitudes of both came from their Christian faith, and consequently they were committed to reconciliation. Today we give thanks for all those who have given new resurrection life to us all through the ways in which their reading of the bible influenced their life and actions.

We give thanks for all those who through the way they lived, spoke and acted have helped us 'to open our minds and to understand the scriptures'.