This is indeed a day of celebration and thanksgiving – a day to celebrate sixty years of our Queen’s faithful service to God and country, a day to be thankful for God’s faithfulness to her and to us, through many years of joy - and other years which have been more troubling, for her, and for us.

Throughout it all, Queen Elizabeth has let us know that she is with us, one with us, serving us, representing us and acting as a focus for national community. As we look at her today – as I had the chance to do on Thursday at my first visit as a Cathedral Dean to a Royal Garden Party – we see someone who looks remarkable for her 87 years. Someone who combines grace and presence, with an interest and attentiveness to her people both individually and nationally. She is a woman who has clearly dedicated herself to public service, but who somehow has managed to avoid being submerged by it, or depersonalized. She is, in short, an inspiration. In the age of plastic or cardboard celebrity, she is the real thing – someone whose presence speaks of something special taking place, a different perspective.

How can this be? And what can others of us called to public service learn from Her Majesty? Before continuing, I want to point out that all are included in the scope of this address: we are all, in one way or another, called to public service. Some may have high profile roles – higher privileges, and higher responsibilities. Some may be less noticeable – but none are excluded, and all are indispensable. All have a part to play in building community.

So, what can we learn from Her Majesty today, as we reflect on the sixty years since her coronation? Well, the coronation and the lead in to it is a good place to start. I learned this week of a small book of prayers that had been prepared for the Queen by the Archbishop of Canterbury, Dr. Geoffrey Fisher as she approached the coronation. Those prayers assist her in recognizing and meditating on these truths:

- She is who she is because she has been made by God
- She is doing what she does because she has been called by God to do it
- She does it in God’s strength, and she does it in God’s service.

And so, she draws the strength for what she does from her relationship with God – this is her secret. It’s not a marketable cosmetic, a sort of Max Factor by Royal Appointment – although I suspect she does apply it, or rather immerse herself in it every day. It is, extraordinarily, not expensive to buy – although it demands our whole life to enjoy it to the full. And it is far from a Royal Exclusive – it is, of course, available to everyone.

We find these themes, as you would expect, written deeply into the coronation service itself, but also revisited week by week – even day by day – in churches throughout the land. It’s worth looking up the coronation service. You will find in there the conviction that as Head of State, the Queen is also defender of faith – she is responsible at the same time for her people’s material and spiritual wellbeing.: country and faith belong together in the history of this land of ours.
At her coronation, the Queen made these oaths: to govern; to uphold justice and mercy; to maintain the 
‘Laws of God and true profession of the Gospel’ and the life of the Church of England. ...

Then, she was presented with a Bible, described in the service as “the most valuable thing that this world
affords ... Here is Wisdom; This is the Royal Law; These are the lively Oracles of God.”

So, what is this wisdom which I have claimed is the Queen’s secret of success, which we might choose to
follow? We find snippets of it, of course, in today’s readings from this most precious book. The first
passage from the book of Joshua contains words which are deeply familiar to me: I wrote them in the front
of my diary at the tender age of 21, when I left everything familiar to go as an intern to work in a church in
the heart of New York City for a Year: “I hereby command you: Be strong and courageous; do not be
frightened or dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go.”

Those words, used at the accession of the Queen, have stood her in good stead – as they stood me when I
was looking for courage and confidence stepping out onto the streets of New York. But like all promises in
scripture, they need to be set in the context of God’s calling, and our obedient response: the Queen was
fulfilling her calling. She knew God had appointed her to the task, and others had confirmed this – it was
neither self-serving, not a random notion that had come unbidden into her head. Her strength has come
from a conviction that God was responsible for putting her in this position – so it was now upon God that
she could rely to find the strength, the wisdom, and the perspective to fulfill her duties.

The second reading, of course, underlined this sense of calling – of God’s ordering, if you like, of society.
“Let every person be subject to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except from God.”

Now this can be used to justify all sorts of abuse, and has been over the centuries – but only by those who
strip the second half of the verse from its context. Even the King, or the Queen, serves God. Each time I
lead a Book of Common Prayer communion service I pray that God would: “so rule the heart of thy chosen
servant ELIZABETH, our Queen and Governor, that she (knowing whose minister she is) may above all things
seek thy honour and glory”

The Queen does not actually serve us, nor does she serve the nation – she serves God, and He holds our
best interests, our material and spiritual wellbeing, in his heart. It is this above all else, I believe, that has
given her strength, and the ability, almost without fail, to hold an even keel, a steady passage, throughout
her ministry as Queen, as her eyes have been upon Him. For it is, truly, a ministry – an act undertaken for
the sake of God. Those who hold public office, and are called to public service, who do so in order to serve
the state, or the community, or, heaven help us, themselves or their party, give their lives to serve
something which is less than perfect - and thereby run the greater risk of abusing others. There is no cause
other than God who is truly to be trusted with our human destiny. Our Queen has demonstrated that to be
so, and demonstrated, I believe, the sustainability, and generosity of spirit that flourishes when it is rooted
in the grace and love of God.

And so her cue is taken from obedience to God’s command, and the concluding words of our second
lesson: Owe no one anything, except to love one another; for the one who loves another has fulfilled the
law.

We are a nation who are loved by our Queen, as she offers her life in obedience to her calling from God.
May we be inspired to do the same.