



The 60th anniversary of the Coronation of Queen Elizabeth II

By Bishop John McDowell

Chronically early as usual, I rounded the corner of Parliament Square at about 9.15am on 4th June to see a long line of people in morning dress and every conceivable form of military uniform snaking slowly towards the Great West Door of Westminster Abbey. Women in hats were also much in evidence, but, unless I am greatly mistaken, the days of the 'fascinator' are numbered.

In Ireland, being early, or even on time, for anything usually means you are wasting no one's time but your own, but the sight of the throng queuing to get into the Abbey seemed like vindication of my chronic habit at last.

I joined the rear of the 'many headed monster' which stretched as far as the entrance to Dean's Yard and was about to engage in conversation with a man, whose uniform was so elaborate that I suspected he had a hand in designing it himself, when I was approached by a member of the Corps of Commissionaires.

"Are you a bishop?" he asked, without much conviction. "Indeed, I am", says I. "Then walk this way", he replied.

So it was that I found myself in the airy spaciousness of the Chapter House, alone.

In Clogher Cathedral, the Chapter House is a cheery little oak-panelled room which doubles up as a Sunday School. In Westminster Abbey, it is not.

I had expected the place to be teeming with ecclesiastical big wigs or, at least, for the majority of the English Bishops to be present - but not so. This was going to be a much more low-key affair than the 60th anniversary of the Accession services which had taken place in 2012 and in which Enniskillen Cathedral



(yes, I have two Cathedrals) had played such a prominent part.

Over the following hour or so, I was joined in the Chapter House by the Queen's Ecclesiastical Household (i.e. the Bishops of London, Guildford, the Dean of Windsor and the Presbyterian Dean of the Chapels Royal in Scotland).

Others included Dr Roy Patton, the outgoing Moderator of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland, his Scottish counterpart and representatives of the Anglican Communion and Free Churches in Scotland, England and Wales.

Just before the procession into the Abbey, we were joined by the representatives of other faiths - Baha'i, Buddhist, Hindu, Jain, Sikh, Zoroastrian, Sunni and Shia Muslims, Orthodox, Reformed and Liberal Jews.

A strange and colourful lot we would have seemed, no doubt, to the people in the same room 60 years earlier.

The range of clergy was representative of faith in

modern Britain, but the service itself was rather gloriously traditional, drawing on the original from 1953.

It was certainly patriotic: we processed into William Walton's *Crown Imperial* and processed out to Edward Elgar's *Pomp and Circumstance No. 4*.

The final piece of music in the service itself was the Walton *Te Deum* in its entirety, which gave all of the earlier processions plenty of time to amble down the fairway and into beautiful spring sunshine.

The Archbishop of Canterbury's short sermon focused on the regality of service which the Queen had made the lodestone of her reign and because of which her great wealth and privilege had never been a barrier between her and the majority of her subjects.

Perhaps the most unusual spectacle during the service was the little procession which brought the Oil of Anointing to the High Altar, led by a Girl Guide leader, and including a judge of the High Court in full fig and a 'Lollipop' woman clad from head to toe in

hi-viz yellow.

I was in the process of congratulating myself on getting possibly the best seat in the house when the winner of the Tallest Nun contest came and stood in front of me.

However, she was there only briefly and I had an hour of uninterrupted views of the entire Royal Family, the Prime Minister, most of the House of Commons attending, the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Dean and Chapter of the Abbey, the back of the Bishop of Guildford's neck and a Halberdier, in full-length boots, who, although well stricken in years, had to stand stock still throughout the entire service.

Perhaps it isn't possible for people outside the United Kingdom or the Commonwealth to understand fully the affection with which the Queen is regarded and they may well think our affection either quaint or childish. It is, however, absolutely real and, because of her advancing years, has become a little elegiac on occasions such as this one.

It was most fitting that the New Testament lesson was read by Kamalesh Sharma, the Secretary-General of the Commonwealth, which organisation owes its life and vigour to the personal commitment of the Queen.

With the G8 having just met in Fermanagh, it is not a bad idea to recognise the achievements of the Commonwealth, a voluntary body of both the developed and developing world, which could never be accused of being a rich man's club.

It was a wonderful day and, for me, an enormous privilege to represent the Church of Ireland.

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