

A sermon preached in the persona of Miles Coverdale by John Partington, Vicar of Sudeley, on the occasion of the re-enactment of Queen Katherine Parr's funeral on 9 September 2012. (For the avoidance of doubt, please note that negative references to what we now call the Roman Catholic church were made in period character, and not my own views.)

Your majesty's herald, your ladyship, Lords, ladies & gentlemen. We are gathered today to commend to Almighty God the soul of her majesty Queen Katherine, the Lady Seymour of Sudeley ... or as our service will speak of her, "this our sister departed, Katherine" – for are not all, whether Queen or Commoner, but miserable and most wretched sinners before the face of almighty God? And while by the providence of God we are separated in different rank and estate in this life, yet at the dreadful day of Christ's coming we shall surely each stand helpless, and naked, before his seat of judgement.

We shall stand helpless, and through our own unworthiness deserving of condemnation – but by the grace of God that is ours through his son our saviour Jesus Christ, we shall stand there as sinners hopeful of mercy and of inheriting with all the saints the eternal felicity of God's heavenly kingdom. This her late majesty, our sister in Christ, Katherine well understood – and these matters were better understood by her, I may add, than by many who through their sex, their learning, or their ecclesiastical preferment, should have been teachers and pastors of the flock of Christ ... but who instead lorded it over that flock, leading it astray with the vain teachings, and worthless traditions, of the Church of Rome – a church founded on the rock of Peter's faith, but long since foundering on the shoals of human greed and superstition.

For, do not mistake: the alterations that you perceive in this offering of worship and service compared with those vain masses and obsequies performed until recently, arise from no worldly whim nor restless quest for novelty ... but rather from a seemly desire to express in our service the glory of the gospel of our saviour Christ. Furthermore, this enunciation of wholesome doctrine in our church's worship is an enterprise that by His Majesty the King's gracious command is even now being prepared for published expression in a book of Common Prayer: one of the firstfruits of this current purifying – I might perhaps mint a phrase and term it this current Reform-ation – of the corrupt doctrines and vain practices that have oppressed both church and state these many years.

I give you, for your better understanding, two instances from this very service whereby you may rightly understand that the godly customs of the divines, till lately robbed of their right meaning by the folly and pretences of the church of Rome – that these customs be wholesome in the use of those who duly, and unfeignedly, believe.

First, the late Queen's bier is honoured with candles within these walls, and flaming torches without – not as a token of uneasy petition, as though in some wise her soul stand in need of heaped-up prayer or fretful concern. For we know of a surety that salvation is ours in Christ as we repent and unfeignedly believe his holy Gospel; we know of a surety that Purgatory is a vain folly, and in no wise to be learned from holy Scripture; we know of a surety that no endeavour of man, whether masses or recitations or payments or good works, avail one whit for our salvation – but rather the unmerited favour of a merciful God: in that alone stands our hope of bliss.

No, be assured that whatever pomp attends this ceremony – whether of procession, of chant, or of flame – such worldly pomp signifies but our humble regard for a gracious Queen and Lady in her earthly estate; and in no wise betokens a vain offering to Almighty God ... on whose gracious mercy alone we, and this our sister Katherine, depend in this life and the next.

Second, and in conclusion: I would have you understand most clearly that the offering, the alms, just taken are for the poor, and not to pay for the prayers of priests and prelates. There is no need of chantry masses and heaped-up prayers for Katherine's soul. By her lady's grace, I have been the late Queen's almoner: rightly understanding the grace of God, she would have no masses said for her soul – but rather would have you give alms to those who are in need, and that you should trust to God alone, as she herself most surely did, for the salvation that there is in Christ for all who turn from sin and who embrace his most holy Gospel.

I end with a prayer written by the late Queen herself. As she made it hers, I would in her name have you make it yours:

"Lord, put me where thou wilt, and freely do with me in all things after thy will. Thy creature I am and in thy hands; lead and turn me where thou wilt. Lo, I am thy servant ready to all things that thou commandest, for I desire not to live to myself but to thee." Amen.