Music has the power to connect us with each other and with our memories. It is what makes singing the National Anthem such a potent statement of our identity. And a key-change in its wording brings home to us the significance of these past days.

Death has intervened to take from us a beloved Sovereign, but the music tells us that we are still the same people, with the same inheritance of tolerance, ingenuity, and a sense of humour. And under God we shall still be served by an anointed Monarch who has been nurtured in this vocation.

I have to confess that in the past, when cycling down the Mall and seeing the Royal Standard above Buckingham Palace, the words of the National Anthem have gone through my mind, prompting thanks for our inheritance, and with the line, “may she defend our laws” ensuring that I took no liberties with the Highway Code and stopped at all the red traffic lights.

As we give thanks for the outstanding dedication of Queen Elizabeth II and see the qualities of her commitment emerging in King Charles, it is worth reflecting on what we mean when we sing of our Monarch as “gracious”.

This word describes character and behaviour rather than physical appearance or regalia. The Psalms, which are the anthems of the Old Testament in the Bible, describe God as being gracious in dealing with us, for “he knows of what we are made: he remembers that we are but dust” (Ps 103:8, 14).

Being gracious is about what we would call courtesy and good manners. It is the foundation of our defence of human dignity and respect for one another.

The example of graciousness that Queen Elizabeth set us was not a symptom of royal privilege: it was a commitment to the quality of life each of us can embrace in building a just and harmonious society.

In her Christmas message of 1975, the Queen spoke about how she drew from the teaching of Jesus in the gracious work of loving our neighbour, whoever that might be. She said,

“It does matter therefore what each individual does each day. Kindness, sympathy, resolution, and courteous behaviour are infectious…And the combined effect can be enormous…We may feel powerless alone but the joint efforts of individuals can defeat the evil of our time. Together they can create a stable, free and considerate society”.

These words are important, both for what they say and because of the person who said them. As Queen, she was also the constitutional head of the judiciary, responsible for our laws and the exercise of justice. Her message was inviting us to honour the gracious rule of Jesus Christ, born as the Prince of Peace, as it outlined what the rule of law should feel like. It should feel fair and decent, as it commits us to stand against evil, with and for one another.

Singing a second verse of the National Anthem adds to the solemnity of an occasion. God’s choicest gifts are indeed distributed, but quite unevenly. Some people appear to have them all: intelligence, good looks, wealth, and genuine moral goodness which is disarming. This is all very frustrating! But the true enjoyment of our gifts lies in their use for the common good and the glory of God, their giver.

Queen Elizabeth was certainly graced with many of God’s choicest gifts and, with selfless generosity, she used them well in the service of the crown. She gave us the years of her youth and beauty; she inspired artistry in fashion, theatre and the entertainment industry; she was a global icon of women exercising power in a rapidly changing world; she spoke to us about being a wife, a mother and a grandmother; she loved sport and had a sense of humour.

Although field sports, and horse-riding in particular, were where she excelled in her own right, Queen Elizabeth supported all sports, including football. Indeed a Government minister once met her at a gala football match, and after the match asked whether she thought had anybody played particularly well. She said, “The band of the Scots Guards were rather good”.

We do ourselves no favours if we allow envy to infect our ability to enjoy the gifts that God has given to others. Envy blinds us to our own gifts but more importantly, it also distorts our vision of God, who loves with equal intensity each and every person made in his image.

So may God continue to pour the choicest gifts on the person called to serve as our anointed Sovereign, gifts that will ultimately direct our minds to God as the giver of life, for which we are accountable, and the one who will restore in the glory of resurrection life what is lost in death.

Of course, we cannot know what that life in its glory and perfection will be like but we can understand some of its contours and they do feature in the little known final verse of our National Anthem which asks for God’s help to “form one family the wide world o’er”.

When those words were written they probably interpreted this family as the British Empire. Queen Elizabeth has been instrumental in re-forming that empire something else: an association of nations that has chosen to come together under the emblem of the Crown in the form of the Commonwealth, serving the common good.

Her vision of the capacity to resist the cycle of greed and conflict drew from faith in Jesus Christ and it remains fundamental to our global future. We need saving from ourselves, in terms of our damage of the earth, and our misuse of political and economic power. In 2011 the Queen put it like this: “God sent into the world a unique person – neither a philosopher nor a general (important though they are) – but a Saviour with the power to forgive”.

Queen Elizabeth has been a fearless ambassador of peace and reconciliation, evident in being the first British monarch to meet the Pope since the Reformation; in the courage of her post-war visit to Dresden, and her visit to the Republic of Ireland and the remarkable moment when in 2012 she shook hands with the Republican campaigner, Martin McGuinness.

Love is what drives this quest for peace, justice and truth, and love is what has inspired the life and work of Her Late Majesty, Queen Elizabeth. And now in death, having served her Lord and Saviour so generously on earth, may these words of faith in God betoken her reward of life in heaven, reunited with her beloved husband, Prince Philip, and all that she loved on earth:

So long thy power hath blest me, sure it still will lead me on,

O’er moor and fen, o’er crag and torrent till the night is gone,

And with the morn those angel faces smile

Which I have loved long since, and lost awhile.

May she rest in peace.

God save the King.

Amen.