

Some thoughts on watching films

Stories are the stuff of life. They allow us to reflect on all sorts of issues at a safe distance as we engage with the characters, cry with them, laugh with them, get cross with them and generally share their experience. How they deal with the issues they come across may frustrate us, or give us new insights; cause us to laugh or cry; result in us hurling abuse at the screen or willing there to be a happy ending. And through it all we can encounter God in all sorts of unexpected places if we only take time to look.

Questions to ask yourself

What did you think of the film? What do you like most? Least?

Which incidents made you *think* or *feel* most strongly? How well did you think the film treated those incidents?

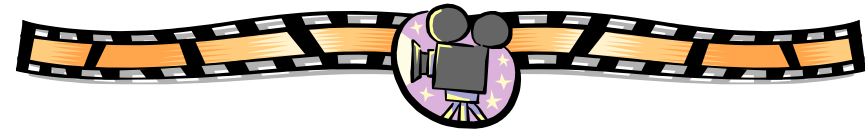
What issues did the film raise for you?

What character(s) do you most identify with and why?

Some trivia about the film

- Helen Mirren says transforming herself into the Queen came almost naturally after the wig and glasses, especially since she shares a default facial expression, a slightly down turned mouth, with the monarch. She also regularly reviewed film and video footage of Elizabeth and kept photographs in her trailer during production. By the end of production, crew members who had been accustomed to slouching or relaxing when they addressed her were standing straight up and respectfully folding their hands behind their backs.
- The five corgis who portray the Queen's dogs won the 2007 London Film Festival's first-ever Fido award for dogs in movies. They won "Best in World" and the "Best Historical" category. They are owned by Liz Smith, a retired UK caterer, and were "discovered" by a film scout at an obedience competition. Their names are Alice, Anna, Megan, Oliver, and Poppy.
- Some aspects of the characters are known to be true to their real-life counterparts. Cherie Blair's hostility to the monarchy has been widely reported, including her refusal to curtsy (said to amuse the Queen in private, as it does in the film). "Cabbage" is an actual term of endearment Prince Philip uses for his wife.
- The jewellery Helen Mirren wears is based on actual jewels owned by Elizabeth II. Some pieces shown include: her trademark 2 or 3 strands of pearls, Queen Victoria's bow brooch (at Diana's funeral), and Queen Mary's button earrings (the large pearl earrings each topped by a tiny diamond).
- The writer Peter Morgan reconstructed the events of the week after the death of Princess Diana through extensive interviews with many unnamed sources close to the Prime Minister and the royal family. Many of these sources were able to corroborate the accounts of others, giving Morgan enough information to imagine intervening scenes.

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**A chance to watch films together.
An opportunity to discuss the issues raised.
A time of friendship, food and fun.**

6th Jan	Star Wars
3rd Feb	Into Great Silence
2nd Mar	Babel
30th Mar	<u>The Queen</u>
27th Apr	The Simpsons Movie
1st Jun	Shooting Dogs

**Films start at 5:30pm
Followed by food, coffee and conversation**

**10 Bletchingdon Road
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The Queen

The Queen, an Oscar winning film, explores the interaction between Elizabeth II and Tony Blair following the death of Princess Diana. In so doing, it invites us to reflect on issues of duty and tradition, how we express our feelings, our responses to divorce and death, and how people "live on" after their physical life is at an end.

Duty and tradition

The Queen has a strong sense of country first, self second. She appears, over Diana's death, to misjudge the public's desire for an official ritualising of its grief. Because Diana is no longer a member of the royal family, such a need does not match any precedent in the Queen's eyes. How do you react to issues of duty and tradition—in your family, in the church, in society? Do we always need to follow precedent? How, and by whom, are new precedents set?

Display of feelings

The Queen believes emotions are to be kept private. Meanwhile, there has been an increasing trend for public figures to display "raw emotion". Indeed, this was part of what people found so appealing about Diana—someone willing to display her emotion, to show warmth and empathy (particularly through touch), in contrast to the cold restraint of other Royal Family members. How should we display our emotions in public? Have things now swung too far the other way (eg. with the debates over Hilary Clinton's recent tears and whether such displays of emotion are genuine or calculated)? When is it appropriate to keep our feelings to ourselves? How do you respond to other cultures where emotional display may be the norm?

The changing nature of celebrity and media

In keeping with an insatiable demand for celebrity-focused news, leadership style has become as important to the media and its public as any political substance. This is something Tony Blair instinctively understands and the Queen has yet to grasp. Has the church anything to learn in this regard? Or is it, too, being left behind and increasingly being seen as something for a bygone age?

Responses to divorce and death

Diana's vulnerability in the build-up to divorce struck a chord with the public. With her death, people needed an opportunity to demonstrate how they felt about her. How did you feel at the time? How can we, as a church, help people in their grief? What do you think of the growing trend to leave flowers, teddy bears etc. after tragic events? Does it serve a useful purpose? Or is it just something that we do to make **us** feel good ("... pulling out their hair for someone they never knew. And they think we're mad!")?

Influence beyond death

Matthew's account of Jesus' burial (Matthew 27: 57—66) indicates that there was some debate about what to do with Jesus' body. There is concern Jesus could become even more influential dead than alive. In the film there is also a clear difference of opinion as to what to do with the body: a private family funeral vs. something more elaborate more in keeping with the idea of Diana as the "people's princess". What parallels can you see between the life and death of Diana and those of Jesus (eg. both challenged the status quo, their deaths both left their supporters reeling)? Has there been some sort of "resurrection" experience of Diana—immortalised in memory, print and screen—that has elements of the Easter story? How does the resurrection of Christ differ?

Memorable quotes

Janvrin: The Prime Minister is on his way, ma'am.

HM Queen: To be, Robin, Prime Minister to be. I haven't asked him yet.

Tony Blair: I would suggest flying the flag at half-mast above Buckingham Palace and coming down to London at the earliest opportunity. It would be a great comfort to your people... and would help them with their grief.

HM Queen: THEIR grief? If you imagine I'm going to drop everything and come down to London before I attend to my grandchildren who've just lost their mother then you're mistaken. I doubt there is anyone who knows the British people more than I do, Mr Blair, nor who has greater faith in their wisdom and judgement.

Tony Blair: Will someone please save these people from themselves!

Prince Philip: Sleeping in the streets and pulling out their hair for someone they never knew. And they think we're mad!

HM Queen: But what if my actions are damaging the crown?

Queen Mother: Damaging it? You're the greatest asset this institution has. One of the greatest it has ever had. ... You must show your strength. Reassert your authority. You sit on the most powerful throne in Europe, head of an unbroken line that goes back more than a thousand years. Do you think any of your predecessors would have dropped everything and gone up to London because a bunch of hysterics carrying candles needed help with their grief?

Campbell: They, er, sent a copy of the Queen's speech. Might want to scrape the frost off it first...

Tony Blair: Yeah, all right, Alastair.

Campbell: Well, at least the old bat's finally agreed to visit Diana's coffin.

Tony Blair: You know, when you get it wrong, you really get it wrong! That woman has given her whole life in service to her people. Fifty years doing a job SHE never wanted! A job she watched kill her father. She's executed it with honour, dignity, and, as far as I can tell, without a single blemish, and now we're all baying for her blood! All because she's struggling to lead the world in mourning for someone who... for the last few years, seemed committed 24/7 to destroying everything she holds most dear!

Relating it to the Bible

1 Samuel 18: 6—9

The jealousy Saul feels for David arises out of David's popularity with the people. When people looked at Diana, they saw what they themselves wanted—a fairytale princess, the Queen of Hearts. And when they looked at the Royal household, they saw a dysfunctional family, unable to change, failing to hear what the Spirit was saying. But maybe the royals, led by the Queen, were simply trying to uphold principles and practices well tested over centuries and, in many people's eyes, instituted and hallowed by God?