

Once upon a time a beautiful young woman met a handsome prince. After a whirlwind romance they were married in a spectacular ceremony watched by 750 million people around the world. It was called the "Wedding of the Century". Less than a year later, the lovely Princess had her first child, then another two years after that. Their homes would be castles and the beautiful family would live happily ever after.

Except this story is a fractured fairy tale. The Princess was miserable. The Prince loved someone else. Their young children witnessed fights and tears and scenes no child should ever see. After years of bitterness and scandals, the Prince and Princess got divorced. Now our fractured fairy tale takes a truly ugly turn. Almost a year to the day after the divorce was finalized the beautiful princess died a violent death in a stark Paris tunnel. She had just celebrated her 36<sup>th</sup> birthday the month before. Her brother decided that she should rest in peace and privacy and he buried her on a small island in the middle of a lake near the house where the princess grew up, where she was once a happy little girl.

The Princess is of course Diana, Princess of Wales. Her brother is Charles Spencer, the ninth Earl Spencer, and the home is Althorp, home to the Spencer family since the sixteenth century. Althorp Estate covers fourteen thousand acres of beautiful countryside in Northamptonshire and the home where Diana lived contains a fascinating variety of pictures, furniture and ceramics, as well as boasting some fine interiors.

Like many great country houses, it has benefited from the discriminating and varied collecting of generations of occupants, their marriages and chance provisions. But the Spencers have also had the knack of going to the right people, its collection of portraits is particularly fine, and justly famous. As a record of a family, and as a record of English portraiture, it is simply outstanding.

For one day in May 2012, Charles Spencer is offering a private tour of this enchanted place for 24 guests. The Earl offered this tour to the Church of the Holy Child in Ormond Beach, Florida. The Earl was very moved by the small Episcopalian church's missions and he wants to see them continue. Earl Spencer decided that for those so inclined to head off to England in the spring, for 24 people who make a donation to the church, so the church's work can continue, he will personally guide the tour of his home.

The estate is open much of the year to visitors but Charles Spencer does not normally conduct tours himself. Nor does he personally greet those arriving, as he will this special morning, with coffee and other refreshments. This will give him time to personally chat with each guest, smile for pictures and sign autographs (as he is almost always so gracious do to). Then the tour begins. Where will he take these 24 people? What wonderful stories will he share as he talks about the art, the history, and the residents of this magnificent home?

After the tour, his guests will be served high tea, a great English tradition, in a private dining room at Althorp. Earl Spencer will make a regretful exit at this point, unable to stay for tea, but what will he have to say about this room? The Churchills are relatives. Did Sir Winston have tea and scones here (or more likely for Sir Winston, brandy and cigars)?

A few years after his sister's death, Charles Spencer created a museum of sorts in her memory, in what used to be the stables. It won't be open in May, but the park around the museum will be open. As you walk around the grounds, you will come across a small building erected to Diana's memory. On the wall is a plaque inscribed with something she said in an interview two months before her death, "Nothing brings me more happiness than trying to help the most vulnerable people in society. It is a goal and an essential part of my life, a kind of destiny. Whoever is in distress can call on me and I will come running wherever they are."

That is profoundly more than just a good quote for the press. It is her great legacy, something to which we all should aspire. Why else are we here if not to help others? It is what gives meaning and purpose to our lives. It is a lesson that the Rector of the Church of the Holy Child, Fr. Comforted Keen, not only preaches to his congregation but demonstrates by example. It is the driving force of the missions of the church. Maybe what this small Florida church does reminded Earl Spencer of his sister's words, something he sees often on his strolls around the grounds. Perhaps it is the motivation behind this gift.

No one outside the immediate family is granted access to the island where Diana is buried. But standing on the winding gravel path you can see quite clearly the tall marble marker on the banks of the tiny island, in the middle of a small pond, where a beautiful princess rests in peace.

If you are interested in the joining this tour or want to know more about the missions and work of the Church of the Holy Child, contact [admin@churchoftheholychild.org](mailto:admin@churchoftheholychild.org).