Marrying and Burying Nones and Strays

Fred Niedner, Crossings Table Talk, 20 May 2025

Weddings and wedding Homilies — Things we must say, things we get to say, assurance that we're not alone, and the certainty that something unexpected will happen . . .

Funerals and Funeral Homilies – Things we mustn't say, things we get to say, assurance that we're not alone, and the certainty that our turn will come . . .

"You couldn't ask for a more honest friend."

Wedding Homiletics

At the very least, this much needs saying among our other well-worn words . . .

- We give thanks with you and for you and we celebrate the story that brought you to this moment.
- You could have eloped or gone to Las Vegas. What do you want, need from us?
- Marriage is hard because life is hard, but you're in good hands—ours, of course, but more importantly, God's trustworthy, wilderness-tested, forever nail-scarred hands.

Funeral Homiletics

From Thomas Long's *Accompany Them with Singing* (WJK, 2009).

Long's seven signs of a "good funeral sermon" as distinct from a mere eulogy (pp. 183-195:

A good funeral sermon is . . .

1. **Kerygmatic.** It declares Christ's victory over death—all death, our death.
2. **Oblational.** It gives thanks for a life that was a gift. "We give thee but thine own." "God gave us _____, and we loved him, even when it was hard to do so. Now we give him back to God who loves him, too, and who can be trusted."
3. **Ecclesial.** We are not alone, but gathered with the saints of all times who have done this—i.e, who have died and who have grieved when a loved one died. We're part of "the communion of saints."
4. **Therapeutic**. Filled with understanding and compassion. Devoid of shallow platitudes. We sit with you mourners in your grief. We will sing for you for now in this wilderness time when you cannot sing.
5. **Missional**. Today is not the end of our lives; tomorrow there will be a world to serve and our labors will be needed by someone, somewhere.
6. **Commemorative**. On the way to the cemetery we tell the stories of the one who has died and all he/she meant to us, our community, our world. We walk to the grave with the deceased, remembering the one with whom we are traveling.
7. **Educational**. We talk frankly of death. We embody facing death and mortality without the terrors of those who have no hope. We don't attempt to proselytize, but give witness by example of what it means to have learned how to "number our days."

Long on "difficult funerals," for those outside the faith (pp. 197-200) . . .

- "We are all sinners, and the territory between 'I believe' and 'Help my unbelief' is very gray and highly populated."
- "It does not do justice to [one who has publicly disavowed faith] to pretend at death he/she was someone he/she freely chose not to be in life, and it undermines the integrity of the language of worship."
- That said, we can still truthfully and sincerely remember such a one before God as our brother/sister and thank God for giving him/her to us to know and to love as a companion on our earthly pilgrimage.
- We can speak of our own faith, including what we believe about God's and Christ's love for and promises regarding everyone whom God has made. (Jesus died with and for both the fellow-condemned on Golgatha.)