

Homily for the Burial of the Dead, September 28, 2019

Yolanda Goldyng Travieso, 1931–2019

By the Reverend Stephen Gerth

Wisdom of Solomon 3:1–5, 9; Psalm 23; Romans 8:14–19, 34–35, 37–39; John 14:1–6

Our Prayer Book still uses a traditional word for our opening prayer of a Eucharist or other service of worship: collect. The Sunday collects, or prayers, are prayed through the week except on a feast day or at a special service like today. The collect for this Burial Mass addresses God as “one whose mercies cannot be numbered.”¹ It’s one of many words in our service that proclaim our confidence, our faith, and our love.

Two years ago, I found myself writing a letter of condolence to the wife of a fellow seminarian—from almost 40 years ago now. We served together in Indiana. I can’t remember when I first met her mother and father. He died first. But in my letter to her I found myself writing something I hadn’t put in words before. In this life, we feel separation from family and friends who have died, but I do not think they feel separated from us. They live in Christ, in the nearer presence of God. As Saint Paul wrote in the First

¹ *The Book of Common Prayer* (1979), 493.

Letter to the Corinthians, “For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive.”²

I’ve been the rector of this parish for over twenty years now. I’ve met so many people. I asked Tony to send me her picture. I was delighted to discover that her face was in my mind. She worshipped here; she prayed here.

Mass has been celebrated daily in this building since 1895—and for 25 years before that in the first church that was on the other side of the square on West 45th Street. Our burial records go back to 1870. At every Mass we pray for those who have died on the anniversary of their death.

It’s all organized on a spreadsheet now. There were three names on the list for August 28. Frank Temple Reamer was 34 when he died on this date. Walter John Murrell was four months old when he died in 1914. Felix Ansart was 85 when he died in 1922. Yolanda’s name is now on our list. And in this place her life and her faith will be remembered on her heavenly birthday, the day she died.

² 1 Corinthians 15:22.

I want to close with the collect—prayer—for this week from last Sunday: “Grant us, Lord, not to be anxious about earthly things, but to love things heavenly; and even now, while we are placed among things that are passing away, to hold fast to those that shall endure; through Jesus Christ our Lord.”³ Amen.

✠ In the Name of the Father, and of the Son,
and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

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³ *The Book of Common Prayer* (1979), 234.