

17th April 2021

Funerals

**“Art is long, and Time is fleeting,
And our hearts, though stout and brave,
Still, like muffled drums, are beating
Funeral marches to the grave.”**

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, A Psalm of Life

Given that the funeral of the Duke of Edinburgh is planned for today, I felt, with no little trepidation, drawn to this important topic.

Funerals have been vastly different this past year because of Covid restrictions, and we don't yet know how the effects of these changes will impinge on the grieving processes. The funeral of the Duke of Edinburgh may be different from what mourners might wish or expect. But our prayer for all who mourn is that the funeral will serve its purpose as a solid bridge into an unknown future, and thus allow loved ones to take their leave of a significant figure in their lives in a dignified, helpful and honest way.

It's clear that selflessness was a part of the Duke of Edinburgh's character. "Don't talk about me," he is reported to have said. "Talk about what matters to me." And, in that sense, the comparative simplicity of his funeral is likely to be what he would have wished. Indeed, many have said that he had already expressed his thoughts about this in his later years.

Might we offer our loved ones some ideas about *our* funeral? How often families flounder in planning a funeral because they look for pointers and find none. So, why not make your wishes known? If you can't verbalise them, write them down and put them in an obvious place. Whether or not those who are bereaved follow them to the letter, your thoughts will be important gifts as they prepare a funeral that works for them.

As Longfellow reminds us, we are all marching to the grave. We may be "stout and brave" as we do, but the "muffled drums" of every heart are beating their own funeral march. Mortality is a given. So give thought to those who will, one day, mourn your passing. Say what you need to say. Write what you need to write. Leave guidance as a help to those who want to do their best for you. And do it *now*, for we know that "Time is fleeing".

A prayer for today

Loving God, stout and brave as I seem to be ... help me to make the best use of the fleeting time I've been given, and face my mortality, openly and honestly. Amen

An original reflection by © Tom Gordon Also available at <https://swallowsnestnet.wordpress.com>