

Homily for the Funeral of Elmira Roever

“For this perishable body must put on the imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality.”

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Our beloved Elmira has passed. She had no husband, nor children; but never let us think that, because of this, she has no family, for we, dear Church, are her family, in both water and in blood, both divine, and thicker than any human relation. In love, it is our duty to mourn her loss, for we indeed have lost someone, and we miss her presence; *yet do not mourn even as others do, which have no hope.* For we all were fond of Elmira, and many of us loved her deeply, as a matriarch of this congregation. But surely, I tell you, Elmira would not have us grieve, but rejoice, for this day, we celebrate the day of her birth into deathless eternity, into the Kingdom of Christ, her God, and ours, who’s *‘kingdom will have no end.’*

For as long as I have known her, there has been a peculiar custom involving how Elmira and I would greet each other. Every week on Sunday, and every Wednesday during Bible Study, when she was able to come, I would see her and sing her name, as some of you probably have witnessed, and she would invariably respond with some quip to the likeness of ‘I woke up again this morning,’ followed by, ‘I don’t have any worry about dying, because I know it is just the Lord’s taking me.’

Here, perhaps, we should mourn; not for her sake, but for ours, for we have lost a theologian; for in these words, which she always repeated to me, almost as a sort of liturgical response to my greeting, she proved herself to be a true theologian.

She understood what St. Paul has spoken to us this day, that *‘this perishable body must put on the imperishable, and that this mortal body, must*

put on immortality.'

Dear Christians, why is it that we have gathered here today? Why is that, though there is a great loss, we come here in our best clothes, with a casket now dressed in pure and celebrated white, with candles lit and voices lilting and organ blasting? With processions and song? Is it because of some great tragedy? Nonsense. *'Have you not known? Have you not heard?'* It is because we know that Christ has been raised from the dead, and ascended to right hand of the Father; and just as it is written that, when Christ departed from his disciples, they returned to Jerusalem rejoicing; so too do we now return to this altar, our Jerusalem, our mount of sacrifice, in wondrous joy, for our Elmira has not died, but has risen to Christ, and to the Father who loved her. Remember what she said, *'It is the Lord's taking me.'* *The Lord, who is the everlasting God.*

Death has not taken her, only delivered her to everlasting bliss. Death has been transformed by Christ into the Gate of Heaven.

By Christ's sacrifice and resurrection, death, the greatest weapon of our ancient enemy, the prince of this world, was ripped from him, and now has been made an instrument of Christ, the King of the Universe. Our Lord wears death like an enemy's sword which he has won in combat, a trophy of his success in his great war against the devil. And now this weapon of Satan has been made the instrument of life eternal. Now the *sword is beaten into a plowshare*, that by it, the field of God's people might be tilled, and produce for Him children, born of water and the word, born to be His forever.

So Elmira had no fear of death, for she saw in it not an end, but a beginning. She saw it as the portal through which she must pass, the moment she must approach, wherein she would *'shed this mortal body, and put on immortality.'*

In being lifted high up on the cross, Christ has conquered the *prince of the power of the air*; in his descent into hell, he has *bound the strong man and plundered his house*; he has driven out all the devils which *wander*

through waterless places, seeking rest. And Elmira, as all of us who have been baptized, is no such waterless place, for we have within us all that water which curses all Satan's works, which once drove from our souls that unclean spirit, crying with authority the word, '*Depart!*' And as it was with all of us, so it is with Elmira, that when the moment of her passing into glory came, she heard within her no sad or morose sentiment, no word of gloom, but only the consoling voice of this living water, crying within her '*Come to the Father.*'

So Elmira faced her death with serenity, and even it seemed, with a smile, even as Satan poured out against her the worst of his arsenal. And even though the devil thought he had destroyed her, yet she was not harmed. For *the souls of the justified are in the hand of God, and the torment of death shall not touch them. In the sight of the unwise, they seemed to die, yet they are in peace.* Yes, she, our sister in the faith, despite all of Satan's warring, is in peace, for peace was won for her long ago by Our Lord, and now this frail, this small, this gentle woman, in her peaceful dying, has mocked Satan, and all his cunning and deceit.

So the organ plays with triumph, as if to blow down the gates of hell. And we sing, proclaiming the victory into which Elmira has entered. And candles we have lit, for we with her are bathed in the light of God's salvation. And the pall adorns the casket, for now to us, even death has been made beautiful.

And processions and singing are not enough to celebrate such a marvelous victory which Elmira has been given in Christ. Let us also eat and drink, and be merry. But no simple food and drink will suffice. For food, let us have the very body of our Lord Christ, and for drink his sacred blood. For this, as I remember, was Elmira's favorite meal, and by it, she was woven into the very body of Christ himself. So too does this meal unite us to Christ, in body and soul, and to our dearly beloved with him, for in his flesh, we are all one.

So do not mourn as others, who are without hope, for Elmira is not far off, but waits to greet you and I both once again in this most blessed feast, and perhaps she will say as she always said, "I woke up again this morning." To the everlasting morning of God's light. And she will say "This is

just the Lord's taking me." Even as it is the Lord's taking you. For by giving you his body, it is as if he is saying "I give this to you now, so that I may take it back, and your body with it, on the day of resurrection, to be mine forever."

The day of resurrection is coming, dear Christians, and so our time apart from Elmira will be *for but a little while*. For on that day, we will no longer see her *through a mirror, dimly*, in this Supper, according to the weakness of our faith, but we will see her face to face.

And then at that time, our celebration now in this modest Church, will continue in the endless halls of the Cathedral of heaven, and together with Elmira, with our lips and in our glorified flesh, we will sing, in joy, and perhaps mockingly, '*O death, where is thy victory, O death, where is thy sting?*'

For no longer will we *bear the image of the man of dust, but we will bear the image of the man of heaven,* Our Lord, Jesus, the Christ, Our God and Champion, to whom alone be all glory, honor and dominion. The devil has been defeated, and even old ladies approach his weapons with derision. For Christ alone rules this world, in his word, and in this Supper. *The time is fulfilled.*

"Behold, the kingdom of heaven is at hand."

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Preached by Pastor Fields

Sermon Texts: Isaiah 40:28-31; 1 Corinthians 15:35-55; Mark 1:4-15.

The bulletin is available [here](#).

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