

Rambling on Sales and Cemeteries

Published February 11, 2022 by Fr. Richard Piontkowski

“What’s it gonna take for me to put you in this custom dug hole today?” I never wanted to be a funeral director or a salesperson but something about chatting up graveyards and funeral accouterments comes natural for a pastor who oversees six Catholic cemeteries. “Sir, you are obviously a man of elegant taste judging by your clean bib overalls; could I interest you in a six and a half footer, near the dandelion patch on the west side of St. Columbkille cemetery and peat bog?”

A good cemetery plot location has oodles of advantages: a view you won’t see, flowers you won’t smell, the sound of the wind through the trees you won’t hear; what’s not to like? Some people prefer to have their remains planted on a hill away from a pesky high-water table. “If mom’s satin dress gets wet in the coffin, we’ll never get the stain out.” “George never learned how to swim, he wouldn’t want to be buried near the river. No problem, ma’am, for a mere six bills, these custom water wings will keep your beloved above the water line and make him the most envied stiff in that section.”

At times there are advantages to the direct approach in sales, “Ma’am could I interest you in a small rectangular property in marble town.” “Sir, why just visit the necropolis when you can purchase a permanent plot there? We’re not talking time share here.” Of course, add-ons push the commission price into the Cadillac range. “A simple grave liner? Have you heard of honoring your father and mother? A simple slab of concrete in the bottom of the grave doesn’t cut it with the Lord. You might as well drop her in a ditch at the poor farm. Now this luxurious vault screams love and affection.”

There are also a few shekels to be drummed up in the perpetual care fee. Let’s be honest, perpetual care means “until the last person who cared died.” Eighty years from now might discover a poison oak patch with a sepulcher under it, but who’s going to complain? The ground squirrels might be playing billiards with some bleached bones on top of ole dad but no one recalls great-great grandpa. The pitch is paramount, “For only one thousand dollars this crypt of your loved one will be kept pristine until Jesus comes to examine it personally on the last day. You do want to make a good impression on God, don’t you?”

The Rule of St. Benedict for monasteries and convents, chapter four, reminds the monks to “Keep death before your eyes daily.” Perhaps easy for a monk or cloistered nun to do, but a bit of a downer for the rest of us. Thinking on death is a fluke for the young, an occasional experience for the middle-aged and a hard reality for the old. It speaks of finality and nothingness but for the Christian this is far from the truth. At death our souls go into the hands of our merciful Lord for judgment, then on the last day our souls are united with our resurrected bodies to be with the Lord forever. St. Paul reminds us in his first letter to the Thessalonians, “Therefore, console one another with these words.”

Until that day arrives can I interest you in a certified pre-owned grave? This little beauty’s previous tenant was evicted for missing a payment. Added plus—the original artificial posies stay on sight. Think of the savings!

IN *Loving* MEMORY



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1956 - 2026