

WITNESS
ROBERT SHROPSHIRE
MEMORIAL SERVICE FOR JOSEPH PIERCE
JUNE 5, 1993

We're here today to celebrate the life and death of Joseph Pierce, a man who has touched all of us and marked our community deeply. It's a time of remembrance, a time to remember the impact that Joe had on us as individuals, and on us as a community. And when I think of the impact that Joe had on us as a community the one word that comes to mind is communication. Joseph Pierce was a great communicator.

One of my fondest and most vivid memories of Joseph Pierce was walking into his room and hearing him coach my young son in reciting "The self is a relation that relates itself to itself and in willing to be itself grounds itself transparently in the Power that posits it." And to hear that rehearsal time and time again was always the image for me of Joe Pierce as a great communicator.

He impacted us as both individuals and as a community and we're here to remember that. We're also here to remember something else. And that is the inescapable fact of death itself. That in the midst of life is death. And that all of us, you and I and all our creations, will one day be no more. We in fact will join Joseph Pierce in the void. Nothing has happened to Joe in that context that won't happen to all of us at one point or another. So death is kind of a great punctuation mark in the midst of life.

And it's a different punctuation mark to different people. For some it's a period, just the end. Nothing happens after it. You just come to the end of your life and it's all over. For others it's a comma, a pause of some sort, and a transition into something else. For others it's a question mark, a big mystery, something you fear, something you're scared of, something you avoid.

And for others it's an exclamation point; a statement about the meaning and focus of one's life. Whatever it is for you it marks our journey through history and marks the journey each of us takes through life.

For those of us who live out of the Word, this is not a sorrowful occasion, but in fact a celebration. The reason we call it a celebration is because this isn't something that happened to somebody that could have been avoided. It's not a tragedy. A tragedy is a thing that happens to this one, and the next one could have avoided it. That one could have been saved from it. This is not something that any of us could avoid or be saved from.

In a few minutes we're going to be called on for prayer, prayer for three things. We'll pray for resignation, to accept the finality

and universality of death itself. We have to come to terms with the fact that none of us is getting out of here alive. All of us at one point or other will make the same journey. We are also going to call for prayers for comfort, for the confidence and courage to see the light and the meaning that is in the midst of life, to see the meaning of our struggles, of our sufferings and our joys and our accomplishments. And lastly we're going to pray for grace - for the gift of a glimpse for a moment of the unseen pattern, the unseen structure of life itself, that gives meaning to our individual lives and gives us the possibility to accept the fact that one day we shall all die. That's why this is a celebration. What we celebrate is not the fact of death. What we celebrate is the unseen pattern, the unseen meaning, the purpose of our existence, the purpose of our lives.