

We gather in a place of worship like this chapel especially on certain special occasions that are considered as milestones in our lives. We want to be present for infant baptisms or dedications, or bar mitzvahs. We are honored to attend weddings. And we hold memorials in a setting such as this. We thus express our solidarity with the protagonists of each ceremony, along with their loved ones. Today we are expressing this solidarity in order to honor those classmates who have passed on ahead of us.

Such moments are also occasions of serious reflection that impacts or even changes our lives. Seeing the children, we may ask ourselves what kind of world are we bequeathing to the next generation. Hearing the exchange of wedding vows may prompt us to reflect on the quality of our own marriages. And at memorial services we reflect on the lives of those whose names are read, as well as our lives, past, present, and future, including our own mortality. This can be even more fruitful and meaningful when viewed from the perspective of those who like us draw on years of experience.

So it's appropriate to have a moment of reflection in the program of this service. The loss of a loved one is potentially a time of grief. In the readings and prayers of this service we hear words like "pain", "mourn", "loss", and "console". The apostle Paul speaks of the "sting of death" and the shortest verse in the New Testament says that before the tomb of his beloved friend Lazarus, "Jesus wept".

But, as another Princetonian has said, the reverse side of the experience of loss is gratitude. This can also be an occasion of celebration, as we remember their impact on our lives. Just a few days ago, on Memorial Day, we were reminded of the words of an American general, which I paraphrase, "Don't regret their loss, but rather thank God that such men lived". Another thought, read in

this service, is that we are led to “cherish all the more the friends that still remain”.

This service will be even more meaningful if it leads us to reflect on our values, on what is really important to us in life. That is a big subject so I would like to focus on just one aspect: “relationships”. We as persons have the remarkable privilege of being capable of establishing and cultivating relationships. The bios of our classmates, written on the occasion of our 50th reunion, which make excellent and profitable reading, though they mention events, pleasures, and achievements, often emphasize the importance of relationships in their lives. One of our classmates concluded, “. . . what remains are friendships.” Another reckoned that our classmates rated friendships as the most lasting value of their Princeton experience. Yet another concluded, “Friendships are most important to a full life.” The word “friends” is found often in the readings and prayers of this service and in the bios of our classmates.

Various relationships are mentioned in those bios: relationships with classmates while at Princeton and afterwards, relationships with friends, colleagues, those we seek to serve, and, sometimes, - and this is appropriate to mention in this miniature cathedral - relationships with God. Most often, we read of their relationships with spouses, children and grandchildren. The quality of these relationships have in large part determined our happiness and satisfaction in life. Even the difficult times in our relationships can increase our wisdom and improve our character.

So let’s reflect on our relationships. Initially, we will be thinking of our relationships with those men whose names are to be read today. We can honor their memory by continuing their work, by learning from their examples, and by remembering their contribution to our lives and to their world. We can also consider our relationship with God. This does not come automatically. The

Second Reading mentions those “who wait for him” and the “soul that seeks him.” The Kaddish exhorts us to magnify and sanctify His great name. They speak of an intentional and deeply personal communion with our Creator, the living God. What place does He have in our lives? Then, too, we can reflect on our relationship with our spouses and families. They are our first responsibility. We can make all these relationships the top priority of our lives. The salutary impact of this memorial service will bear fruit in the dedication of our lives to the strengthening of these relationships.

Happily, relationships can be lasting. The First Reading says, “their Friendship and Society are, in the best Sense, ever present” A New Testament passage says of Abraham, “he still speaks though he is dead.” Many have said that their loved one lives on in their heart.

We not only honor these classmates here in the Princeton Chapel, but we also recognize that so much of what is good, useful, true, interesting, beautiful, and worthwhile in our lives arose from relationships begun right here on this campus many years ago. This is certainly true in my life. So we happily come back to Old Nassau to recall, nurture and celebrate those relationships, and all those who are special in our lives.