
Words for Charlie Roper

**A homily by the Very Rev. Sam Candler
at the Funeral of Charlie Roper**

As we gather today, remembering the good shepherd Charlie Roper, we each bring beautiful and deep memories of a faithful man. There is a lot of history in this room, a lot of sacred history, and there is a lot of knowledge. Church and family alike: we all know a lot about blessed Charlie. But there is also a lot we do not know about.

We remember, many of us, his jolly and witty self, his partnership with blessed Betty, the jokes they could tell (“ribald” would be the word), the twinkle in both their eyes. They have been quite a duo.

The Episcopal Church, in particular, remembers a wise and devoted pastor when we remember Charlie. In his faithful parish positions, he was able to combine both progressive leadership and traditional pastoral care. He cared for his people, loved his people, and they knew it. But the good shepherd, Charlie, combined care and love of flock with an astoundingly firm sense of theological principle. He knew the forward and progressive course of the faith, the justice element of faith; and he spoke it, he led with it, and he loved it, too. Thank you, Charlie, the faithful parish priest.

It is my sense (my musical sense!) that he was able to lead with both precise principle and wise care, because he was a musician. He knew how to pay attention to detail while also swinging away with rhythm. He knew how to honor the past and to live for the future. He was an artist! It was pretty much him, who designed The Church of the Holy Cross, in the round, in Decatur. It was he, who helped lay the amazing and generous foundation of the spirit of St. Thomas Church, in Columbus. (There are people here today who were his parishioners at Holy Trinity, Decatur, where he was curate!)

In his later years, here at the Cathedral, we were honored and graced by his presence, every Sunday, he and Betty, sitting right there on the aisle. Charlie always sat about ten rows up from where Walter Brueggemann sat; it is Walter, whom Charlie really wanted to preach this funeral. They are similar souls. (But Charlie—and you—got me instead!)

Those of us in this room who are clergy remember all the little gifts that Charlie would give us. Maybe it was a regular phone call, a check-in visit, certainly to St. Thomas, Columbus, and certainly to this place, the Cathedral of St. Philip. Several times a year, Charlie would simply appear at my office, to tell me that he and Betty were praying for me, and to ask me how I was doing. This was not mere performance or obligation for Charlie; this was sincere care. Thank you, Charlie.

Those of you who were his friends remember that the same care was often accompanied with a physical gift. Maybe it was a Christmas card poem, with poetry that he had written himself. Maybe it was some delicious candy or treat. And, maybe, just maybe it was a genuine piece of music, something he had written in his creativity. Many a parish priest has valued, and listened to, Charlie Roper, and some bishops have, too! Thank you, Charlie, a man of true pastoral care.

Still, there is a lot that those of us in the Church do not know about. Most of us do not know about his intricacies of his family, his children and grandchildren. We do know that those complexities involved tremendous love from Charlie with his family, and we salute each of you who helped shape that love.

I thank Charlie’s family, too, today, for your faith and perseverance. Charlie used to sit and share with me some of that personal journey, but I certainly don’t know all of it. I do know that his family has heard, over and over

again, how wonderful Charlie is—like the families of many a faithful parish priest—and now they hear it again. Thank you, family, for persevering with the Church, and putting up with the Church!

We know a lot about Charlie, but there will always be a lot, in the mystery of life, that we don't know. And that is how he leaves us, as he dances and sings on into another world. The music we sing today are his choices. "Out of depths I cry to thee." He knew how to cry from the depths. "Praise my soul the king of heaven." Charlie knew how to praise God. "Praise the Spirit in Creation;" Charlie knew the incarnation of the Spirit, too. "Lift High the Cross," and Charlie bore that cross well.

We gather today, with the mystery of what we know and what we don't know, but in the spirit of holy reconciliation. Charlie knew, and knows, our situation of knowing and not knowing. If heaven is that place where all things, and all people, are reconciled in God, then Charlie has been headed for that place for a long time. And we celebrate, today, that he has arrived. The holy angels are welcoming him to paradise. He has arrived in that place of holy reconciliation, mysterious and glorious as it is.

Jesus, the true Good Shepherd, leads all of us towards reconciliation and resurrection. And, today, Jesus and the angels welcome another good shepherd, one we have known and valued and loved. Thank you, Charlie, our good shepherd.

AMEN.

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