

FUNERAL SERMON FOR VERA SZABIET 7/29/2017

We are gathered today to say farewell to our beloved and dear mother, grandmother, relative, parishioner and friend Vera, but also we are here to give thanks and to praise the Lord for the privilege of those who knew her. I personally did not know her. Vera moved to Pennsylvania a couple of years before I was assigned to St. Basil's, so I was not privileged to personally know her, although I did know her in some way through correspondence and her requests from time to time to light candles on her behalf here at St. Basil's.

Probably the most difficult thing we go through in this life is the loss of a loved one. In as much as she is now with the Lord, yet no one can take away from us all the cherished memories that she left behind with her loved ones. Those memories will go on with us for as long as we live, until our time comes and the Lord takes us from this world as well. Our Lord Jesus Christ was not immune to the suffering and sorrow we go through at the death of a loved one. When Jesus was told that his friend Lazarus had died, it is recorded in the Gospel that Jesus wept.

So why death? Did God create death? Why must all human beings go down that path? Many people today try to explain death as very natural and accept death in a matter of fact way as simply the inevitable biological end of creation. This explanation comes from those who do not believe in nor know the God of the Christians, the One True God. For Christians, death is a tragedy, and it was never meant to be that way. God created us out of love as his greatest creation. He calls us brother, sister, and friend. God created a beautiful immortal world and gave us many gifts and privileges in order to enjoy peace and life on earth with the Lord as our loving and protecting Heavenly Father. Along with the gifts that God bestowed upon us, the Lord gave us moral free will and the ability to choose good or evil. Evil is nothing less than disobedience of God and choosing that which is not good. Having abused this gift of moral freedom, mankind chose to rival God and try to become like God themselves. As a result, it became impossible for creation to survive and remain immortal. It is for this reason that death came into the world, and the nature of mankind and the world changed.

But the good news is that God did not abandon us, or choose to simply destroy His beloved creation. He loves us so much, that He sent His only begotten Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, to die on the Cross for our sins, and through the Cross, to restore and renew creation. In the Resurrection, we all now have the possibility, as we heard in the Gospel today, to regain Paradise lost, to achieve immortality, to rise of the dead and to well in peace and love for eternity in the presence of God. In fact, this is now the very purpose of our lives, to unite ourselves with Christ, to have faith, to repent for our sins, and to prepare ourselves to be made worthy of the Kingdom of Heaven.

Vera believed in and trusted in God. She and her husband Adam were lifelong communicants of St. Basil's Orthodox Church. Adam sang in the choir. In Vera's obituary, it says that she was a member of the Sisterhood. Vera believed in the power of prayer. From time to time I would receive requests from her to light candles her at her beloved St. Basils's.

Maplewood and the surrounding area is where Vera was born, grew up, married, and spent most of her life. St. Basil's was always her church, where her husband sang in the choir and where she and her husband would pray, confess their sins, and receive Holy Communion. Vera has now come home to take her eternal rest.

Our beloved Vera's memory will not fade away. She will always be remembered in the church that she loved, and I will pray for her soul to be with the Lord, for there is no barrier, as St. Paul said, because the Lord lives in the believer. May our merciful and loving God comfort you and

give you strength in this time of grief. On behalf of His Eminence Archbishop Michael, the parish council, and the parishioners of St. Basil's, I extend to you my deepest love and sympathy. May the servant of God Vera find rest, where there is no longer any sickness or suffering, but eternal joy and peace with our Lord, and may her memory be eternal!