

Integration Fourteen

WRITING YOUR OWN EUOLOGY

“If it is that we are to die, how are we called to live?”

- Fr. John Dunne, CSC

One way to clarify our vision of life is to keep the end of our life in mind. In this exercise, we want you to write your own eulogy. A eulogy offers words of remembrance for a person who has passed away and how they have impacted our lives. **We want to focus on one question: when the last chapter of my life is written, how do I want to be remembered? Write a brief reflection on what your ideal eulogy or obituary would be.**

Another way to think of this would be to consider: if I could put one epitaph on your tombstone, or a text message to the world, what would it be? We recommend that you spend some time walking around a cemetery to reflect and to examine various epitaphs. Also reflect on funerals that you have attended that had eulogies. What do you remember from them?

Examples

- If you need inspiration, watch [this TED Talk](#) from a guy who analyzed 2,000 obituaries. Spoiler: the most used word is “help”.
- Alfred Nobel had the bizarre and traumatizing experience of [reading his own obituary](#) when reporters mistook his brother’s death to his. The obituary described Nobel as a “merchant of death” due to his invention of dynamite, leading Nobel to create the Nobel Foundation and its prizes with his will.¹
- Fyodor Dostoevsky was marched in front of a firing squad before being pardoned at the last second, which dramatically shaped his life and worldview. As David Brooks comments:
 - “Most of us don’t get marched in front of a firing squad and then pardoned. Most of us learn the lesson Dostoyevsky learned gradually, over seasons of suffering, often in the wilderness. The lesson is that the things we had thought were most important—achievement, affirmation, intelligence—are actually less important, and the things we had undervalued—heart and soul—are actually most important.”²

¹ There is some dispute as to the specifics of the story, but the general point holds up.

² Brooks, David, *The Second Mountain: The Quest for a Moral Life*, Random House Publishing Group, Kindle Edition, pg. 51.



“Read your own obituary notice they say you live longer.
Gives you second wind. New lease of life.”

- James Joyce, *Ulysses*

Write Your Own Eulogy Tips

- Examine the eulogies or obituaries of people you admire for ideas.
- Write down what you consider to be the ideal [eulogy virtues](#). Do you live up to those? How can you in the future?
- Check out the concept of [memento mori](#) and its relation to the spiritual life.
- As well as St. Ignatius’ [deathbed meditation](#) from the Spiritual Exercises
- Check out previous students’ chosen [tombstone epitaphs](#).
- Explore the [Franciscan perspective](#) on the Passion and death of Jesus as a message of freely given love, not atonement: “Jesus did not come to change the mind of God about humanity (it did not need changing)! Jesus came to change the mind of humanity about God.”

Scientific Foundations

- The research on death reflection is both limited and evolving, but some early studies suggest that reflecting on one’s mortality can put life in perspective, increase life satisfaction and motivations to connect to and help others.³
- Reflecting on your death can also enhance gratitude and appreciation for what one has.⁴

³ Yuan, Zhenyu, et al., “[Memento Mori: The Development and Validation of the Death Reflection Scale](#)”, *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, vol. 40, no. 4, 2018, pp. 417–433.

⁴ Frias, Araceli, et al., “[Death and Gratitude: Death Reflection Enhances Gratitude](#)”, *The Journal of Positive Psychology*, vol. 6, no. 2, 2011, pp. 154–162.