

Funeral Liturgy



In Sure and Certain Hope:

Preparing a Catholic Funeral

The Church has always made the care of the grieving a priority in her ministry, beginning with the example of Jesus himself. The miraculous raising of Lazarus, the healing of Jairus' daughter, the reference in the Beatitudes to the comforting of those who mourn—all these are clear expressions of the Lord's concern of those experiencing the pain of the loss of a loved one.

I know of no greater comfort that we can give to a grieving person than to proclaim our hope in the resurrection of the dead. The pain, suffering and loss of a loved one can become a blessed moment when the Spirit works wonders in the hearts of those who believe.

Jesus knew this to be true. He told His disciples without any doubt or hesitation: *Do not let your hearts be troubled. You have faith in God; have faith also in me. In my Father's house, there are many dwelling places. If there were not, would I have told you that I am going to prepare a place for you? I will come back again and take you to myself, so that where I am you also may be.* (John 14:1-3)

From our faith comes our sure and certain hope in the face of death. These reflections on Catholic funerals and burials will, I trust, be of help to the parishioners of St. Jude the Apostle Parish.

THE FORGIVENESS OF SINS AND SALVATION OF THE SOUL

Into your hands, Father of mercies, we commend our brother/sister in the sure and certain hope that, together with all who have died in Christ, he/she will rise with him on the last day. (Catholic Funeral Liturgy)

As Catholics, we believe that what happened to Jesus in His resurrection from the dead will also one day happen to us. This hope in life after death

has brought joy and comfort to millions of believers as they mourn the death and experience the loss of a loved one.

While the Church's outreach to the grieving has been constant, entering into the process of caring for a person and their family best occurs before the moment of death.

Through visits to the sick at home, the hospital or the nursing home, the parish has an important opportunity to strengthen the dying person and the family.

Through the celebration of the Rite of Penance and the Anointing of the Sick, the Church can strengthen a person's ability to cope with life-destroying illness and prepare to meet Christ, our Judge and Redeemer.

Through the celebration of Viaticum, a person's last Holy Communion, the Church shares with the dying Catholic the Eucharistic food needed for the final journey to the Lord.

Through prayers for the dying and the dead, the Church provides heartfelt comfort and hope in moments of great testing and sorrow. The Church in her prayer accompanies the deceased through the time of judgment into purgatory and heaven. Especially through masses offered for the dead, the consequences of sin are erased and the soul is received by Christ into eternal happiness in heaven.

Visitation (Wake Service)

The Vigil for the Deceased is the first way that the Church captures the sentiments of those who are grieving and sets them in the context of our faith. A prayer service with readings selected from Scripture to fit the circumstances of the deceased, a homily that comforts and gives hope, intercessions that speak to the faith of those gathered around the deceased, and prayers selected from the rich resources found in the *Order of Christian Funerals* can do a great deal to prepare people to enter into the Christian spirit of the Funeral Liturgy. The Rosary or other prayers to the Blessed Virgin Mary can be part of the Vigil.

Eulogies are best given at the Vigil Service or at some appropriate time during the wake. While there is a natural desire to say good things about a

person who has died, we must always remember that in the context of prayer, it is the working of God's grace in the life of the deceased for which we want to give thanks and praise. Eulogies in the context of prayer must be more than mere tributes to the goodness of the deceased. There must be a reference to what God has done for the deceased person and for us through him/her. The priest and parish bereavement ministers are available to assist families in selecting Scripture readings and music for funeral liturgies.

Funeral Liturgy (Usually Mass)

Celebrating the funeral liturgy at Mass in the parish church is the normal way in which most Catholics experience the *Order of Christian Funerals*. The Eucharist looks forward to our participation in the heavenly banquet, where we are united with Jesus, the saints, and all those who share eternal life. Jesus said *whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood shall live forever*. (John 6:54) The Eucharist is truly the central point in a Catholic Funeral. Its effectiveness is greatly enhanced when the family participates in appropriate ways: clothing the casket with the pall, selecting the Scripture readings, serving as lectors or extraordinary ministers, singing the responses and they hymns and, most especially, receiving Holy Communion.

The funeral homily is of utmost importance in the funeral liturgy. A homily may only be delivered by a priest or a deacon, as liturgical homilies are part of the sacramental rite of the Eucharist. The homily speaks of the mystery of Christ's death and resurrection and gives the deeper meaning that is found in the experience of death and dying. The homily occurs within the context of a funeral Mass that is offered for the forgiveness of sins and the salvation of the soul of the faithful departed.

Committal Service (at Cemetery)

The Rite of Committal is the final liturgy in the *Order of Christian Funerals*. Like the Vigil Service, the Rite of Committal makes use of Scripture, a few words of hope by the presider, intercessions and prayers.

A cemetery is a place of honor and respect for those who have died. It is a memorial to all who are interred there. It is a sacred place where Catholics come to express their grief and hope for their loved ones who have

preceded them in death. It is consecrated ground, fitting for someone whose body was a temple of the Holy Spirit on earth and now awaits the resurrection from the dead.

To have a representative of the Church present at this final moment is a great source of consolation to those who will now have to continue their journey in life without their beloved. While a priest may be unable to preside at the Committal Service, a deacon or a trained bereavement minister may represent the Church at this final moment.

The Role of Music in the Funeral Rites

The *Order of Christian Funerals* notes that the role and place of music is "integral to the funeral rites." Hymns and songs that help to express our Christian hope, consolation for those who mourn, and that help to point us to the Paschal Mystery of Christ's saving death and resurrection should, as much as possible, be part of each of the three major ritual moments: the wake, the funeral Mass and the committal service. Music or songs that are not liturgical or are otherwise inappropriate for the funeral Mass can be included at various times outside the funeral rites, for example during the wake or after the committal service at the cemetery.

Speaking in Remembrance - Eulogies at Funeral Masses

Eulogies and personal remembrances have their place at the wake service but not, as such, in the funeral Mass itself. The Mass is offered for the forgiveness of sins and the salvation of the soul of the departed. The liturgy speaks of the mystery of Christ's death and resurrection, which gives the deepest meaning to the life of the deceased.

In this context, a time for a word of thanks or other announcements may be placed between the Prayer after Communion at the end of the Mass and the Commendation. A family member or friend may take this opportunity to say a word of thanks to those attending, announce plans for the interment, and invite and direct those present to a meal that would follow the services.

Because of the sensitivity of the funeral experience, these announcements should be written ahead of time. The words should be limited, brief, and submitted in writing to the priest celebrant of the Mass.

The pastor may occasionally make suitable exceptions to this norm, depending on the circumstances and pastoral need.

Cremation

The Church prefers to bury the body of the deceased in consecrated ground.

For a variety of reasons, some people may prefer to have the body of the deceased cremated before it is buried. This is allowed, as long as there is no intentional denial of the final Resurrection of the body.

The burial or interment in a cemetery, mausoleum, or columbarium should occur as soon as possible after the Funeral Mass, so that the cremated remains of the body are not kept in the funeral home or family home. Out of respect for the body, the Church does not permit the cremated remains of the body to be scattered over water or some favorite place. Cremated remains are to be given the same respect as the body they were.

Care for Miscarriages

All life is sacred and the remains of fetuses or stillborns are to be given reverent Christian burial, preferably in a Catholic cemetery.

The pastor will work closely with families in preparing such burials by contacting a funeral director when necessary. When these burials are not handled directly through Catholic hospitals, families should make arrangements with a local funeral director.

Donation of Organs or the Whole Body

Moved by charity, Catholics may donate their bodies or parts of their bodies to advance medical science. The only limitation is that, upon eventual disposition of the body or its parts, there should be some reasonable assurance that the remains will be disposed of in a proper, reverent manner. After organ removal for medical research, whatever remains of the donor's body should be given an appropriate burial.

The family of the donor should celebrate a memorial Mass after the person's death. The rite of committal with Final Commendation (*Order of*

Christian Funerals, nos. 224-233) may appropriately conclude the prayers for the donor and their family.

Amputated Extremities

Amputated extremities of Catholics are to be given reverent Christian burial. The local funeral director should be contacted in dealing with these situations. Assistance is also available through the Parish Office.

Charity Burial

Burial is available to every Catholic who, at the time of death, is entitled to receive Christian burial. Inability to meet the cemetery costs is no deterrent to Christian burial.

When a family is faced with financial hardship, the family and/or the funeral director should contact the Parish Office as soon as possible. The Parish Office will describe the sources of funds available for assistance and recommend the nature and degree of charitable assistance to be given.