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DIOCESAN POLICY ON EULOGIES AND WORDS OF REMEMBRANCE AT FUNERAL MASSES

Ritual Requirements

The ritual practice of the Church requires that **A**a brief homily based on the readings should always be given at the funeral liturgy, but never any kind of eulogy@ (*Order of Christian Funerals*, no. 308).

At the Vigil Service **A**a homily based on the readings is given to help those present find strength and hope in God=s saving words@ (*Order of Christian Funerals*, no. 89). It is also possible for a member or a friend of the family to speak in remembrance of the deceased at the Vigil Service (*Order of Christian Funerals*, no. 90).

The Church in its ritual prayer distinguishes between a homily, words of remembrance and a eulogy, lauding the homily, making room for words of remembrance at the Vigil Service, but at no time diverting the celebration of the Eucharist with a eulogy.

A eulogy is a public speech that focuses on the deceased person, with the intention of praising him or her.

A homily is a discourse within the context of liturgical prayer that invites the assembly to consider and interpret its life and experience in light of a biblical text. In a funeral homily, the preacher unfolds the scripture passages in a way that draws the assembly to appreciate God=s power at work within the community and the deceased. This homily is eucharistic, a statement of praise and thanks to God. **A**It should invite the deceased person=s family and friends to simultaneously hold on to the values and lessons of this person=s life, entrust the person=s final destiny into the hands of God, and remember the shortness and fragility of human life and God=s invitation in Christ to live every moment fully and abundantly@ (Letter of Bishop F.B. Henry, Diocese of Calgary, 2003).

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Diocesan Considerations

1. Many priests in our diocese uphold the rubrical policy that no eulogy be given in connection with the Funeral Mass, thus abiding by the 1998 Directive of the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops, and the *Order of Christian Funerals*, no. 308.
2. Culturally, there has been a strong movement toward celebrating the life of the deceased, noted by the wording in obituaries and the marketable services of funeral homes.
3. Even in our Catholic parishes the funerals of civic dignitaries and people of renown have been shaped by cultural expectations, often with a number of remembrances, or eulogies being offered within or before the Funeral Mass.
4. An attempt to provide the same dignity and care for all deceased persons and their families has caused some of our pastoral staffs to **Astretch@** the ritual norm, making room for **A**words of remembrance@ prior to the celebration of the Funeral Mass.
5. The Diocesan Policy of 2002 made way for **A**words of remembrance@ to be offered prior to the Funeral Mass, when a Vigil Service is not celebrated.
6. The **A**pastoral stretching@ of the 2002 policy has made room for **A**words of remembrance@ to occur prior to the Funeral Mass, according to the discretion of the pastor.

Diocesan Directive

In light of this pastoral development, the Diocese of London recognizes that three contexts are possible for **A**words of remembrance@:

- a) the Vigil Service;
- b) at the graveside, or the funeral reception after the interment;
- c) in the church prior to the liturgy, that is, prior to the reception of the body at the entrance to the church.

Offering **A**words of remembrance@ prior to the Funeral Mass is an exception to the liturgical norm. The Bishop of London has granted this exception for pastoral reasons. *Under no circumstances, however, is a eulogy or **A**words of remembrance@ to be given during the Funeral Mass.*

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To ensure **A**words of remembrance@ are appropriate for a liturgical setting, the pastor will request a copy of the text in advance, and the time of the speech be limited to three minutes. Two examples of appropriate texts are provided in the appendix.

Every effort will be made at a priest=s, deacon=s and bishop=s funeral to follow the same guidelines.

Suggested Practice

Create a separation of time between the **A**words of remembrance@ and the Funeral Mass:

- \$ Seat the family members
- \$ A member of the pastoral staff invites the **A**words of remembrance@
- \$ Pause for silent prayer at least five (5) minutes
- \$ Bring those who will place the pall on the casket to the entrance of the church
- \$ Begin with the reception of the body and the placing of the pall
- \$ Sing the Opening Hymn
- \$ Opening Prayer
- \$ Liturgy of the Word and the rest of the Mass

Some adaptation of this procedure is required in churches without a narthex.

Ongoing Catechesis

At the same time every effort should be made to:

- a) Catechize about the Vigil Service and its opportunity for **A**remembering@.
- b) Catechize about the difference between the eulogy and the funeral homily.
- c) Catechize about the difference between a celebration of the deceased person=s life and the celebration of Eucharist.
- d) Preach in a way that reveals awareness of the deceased and family members, offering strength and healing.

December 2010

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