What does the Church teach about giving eulogies at funeral liturgies?

Jesus said, "Do not let your hearts be troubled. 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?" (John 14:1a, 2). Even with our certain hope in the resurrection, the death of a loved one is a painful experience. At this time the community of faith gathers to support one another, offering hope through the resurrection by which we are all joined.

Therefore, "at the death of a Christian, whose life and faith was begun in the waters of baptism and strengthened at the eucharistic table, the Church intercedes on behalf of the deceased because of its confident belief that death is not the end nor does it break the bonds forged in life" *(Order of Christian Funerals* 4). As a people of faith, **we "celebrate the funeral rites to offer worship, praise, and thanksgiving to God** for the gift of a life which has now been returned to God" *(OCF* 5).

While it is common in many faith communities for someone to deliver a eulogy at the funeral service, this is not part of the Catholic funeral rites (and was not permitted in any circumstances prior to 1989). This is not to say that the deceased is not to be remembered at all or that stories about them cannot be shared, but the praise often given the deceased in a eulogy is praise properly directed to God alone. When those whom we have loved have died, **it is only natural for us to desire to speak publicly in remembrance of them.** While the Church permits that "a member or friend of the family may speak in remembrance of the deceased" *(OCF* 170), this is best done during the celebration of a vigil service *(OCF* 62), usually held in the home of the deceased or in the funeral home. The Church further instructs the presider that the homily at a funeral liturgy is to avoid the literary style of a eulogy *(OCF* 27, *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* 382), focusing on "God's compassionate love and on the paschal mystery of the Lord" *(OCF* 27). In this way, we celebrate the life of the deceased as joined to the life, death, and resurrection of our Lord.

Either **during the vigil or at a reception following the Rite of Committal are the preferred times to offer remarks concerning the way in which the deceased has lived a life with Christ.** It may even be possible to indicate in the obituary that members of the community will be invited to speak at the vigil. The vigil is the first of three parts of the complete Catholic funeral rites, which include the vigil, the funeral Mass, and the Rite of Committal at the burial site.

Because many families do not celebrate a vigil and the Church's desire that "these rites should be scheduled at times that permit as many of the community as possible to be present" *(OCF* 11), it is the practice at Holy Family of Nazareth that after communion **one member or friend of the family may speak to the Christian life of the deceased for three to five minutes. The speaker is asked to kindly respect this time allotment.** Delivering remarks is certainly not required and, given that family members "should not be asked to assume any role that their grief or sense of loss may make too burdensome" *(OCF* 15), is not expected. Should a member or friend of the family be chosen to give their remarks, there must be only one person and their remarks may not under any circumstances be longer than five minutes. Remarks may be given before the final commendation and should be scheduled when the funeral arrangements are made with the parish staff.

As pastor of Holy Family of Nazareth, it is a great honor for me and the entire parish staff to serve you as we honor our deceased loved ones in this final and most reverent of ways. Let us together honor those who in baptism died with Christ that they might be joined with Him in eternal life.

*Rev. Albert B. Becher*

*Pastor*

**FUNERAL LITURGY – WORDS OF REMEMBRANCE**

You have been asked to deliver some words of remembrance either before or after the funeral liturgy of a loved one. This is a great honor and requires forethought and preparation on your part.

**These words of remembrance should not exceed 4 minutes and should be submitted in writing 24 hours before the funeral mass.** Your remarks should be emailed to the priest and Sharon Gross at sgross@holyfamilychurch.net. As a guide, one page double-spaced usually takes about 3 minutes to read.

**Best Practices**

* Be selective: What are the main few things that you want everyone to hear and know about the deceased? Make remarks that describe their good character and how they lived out their faith – words that lift the mourners’ spirits and allow them to smile.
* Stay focused: Your task is to speak briefly in remembrance of the deceased and do so in a spirit of composure.
* Prepare and practice: It is best when you prepare and practice a written recollection of an event in the life of the deceased that highlights an endearing quality of the person.
* Go for brevity: Four minutes maximum. Know what you will say to start and know what your ending will be.

**Things to Avoid**

* Avoid making it a eulogy – a formal speech in praise of a person.
* Avoid making it an extended obituary. In other words, you do not have to recount the person’s long life history and achievements in great detail.
* Don’t leave the mourners sadder than when you started.
* Don’t try to do it off the cuff. You might start to wander and not know how to bring what you’re saying to a good closing.

**But Above All...**

Pray about what you need to say and ask God to bless you in this ministry.

*If you have any questions, please call 972-252-5521.*