

Planning for Catholic Funerals

INTRODUCTION

“... When a member of Christ’s Body dies, the faithful are called to a ministry of consolation to those who have suffered the loss of one whom they love.... The Church calls each member of Christ’s Body – priest, deacon, and layperson – to participate in the ministry of consolation: to care for the dying, to pray for the dead, to comfort those who mourn....The community’s principal involvement in the ministry of consolation is expressed in its active participation in the celebration of the funeral rites, particularly the vigil for the deceased, the funeral liturgy, and the rite of committal. For this reason these rites should be scheduled at times that permit as many of the community as possible to be present”.

Thus, the Funeral Liturgy of the Catholic Church is not the personal prayer of the deceased or of the family of the deceased. As with every Liturgy of the Church, the Funeral Liturgy is an official, public prayer of the Church. In the case of the Funeral Liturgy, it is the Church’s prayer for the immortal soul of the deceased and for the consolation of those loved ones left behind. The prayers, readings, intercessions, and musical selections should represent the “Prayer of the Church” and still be universal in nature.

In the celebration of the funeral rites, the laity may serve as readers, musicians, ushers, pallbearers, and, if they are already commissioned to do so, as Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion. The family is encouraged to assist the parish ministers in planning the funeral rites: in the choice of readings from the prescribed scriptural texts, the selection of music appropriate for the rites, and in the designation of liturgical ministers, such as servers and readers.

MUSIC

Sacred music is an integral part to the celebration of the funeral liturgy. The Director of Worship, or a substitute chosen by the Director, and our funeral choir will be present to foster the full and active participation of the assembly in the Funeral Mass or Funeral Liturgy outside of Mass. The selection of music must be liturgical and express our Christian belief in the gift of the resurrection. Religious hymns should speak to the mysteries of our Faith regarding death and resurrection. While popular music may warm the hearts of those who are left behind, it must never replace sacred music, and is not suitable for a Funeral liturgy. Such music is better suited to be played during the visitation or during the luncheon, if applicable. Every effort must be made to accompany the funeral rites with appropriate hymns, responses, and acclamations. The Director of Worship and Pastor will assist and guide the family in appropriate musical selections for the Liturgy.

No taped music of any kind will be permitted immediately before, during the liturgy, or during any of the three formal parts of the “Order of Christian Funerals” (Vigil, Funeral Mass/Liturgy, or Rite of Committal).

We do not label or title our funeral Mass as a "Celebration of the Life of..." That label is frequently used in our culture for the funerals of celebrities. Every Catholic funeral is a celebration of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus – a Eucharistic celebration. The deceased is remembered as one who shared in Christ's life through baptism. We believe that God is faithful to us, and so we believe that the deceased lives in Christ forever.

THREE PARTS TO A CATHOLIC FUNERAL

In these three sequential rites, the Church offers to those who are mourning a way to prepare themselves spiritually and emotionally, to say their goodbyes. More and more Catholics are eliminating one or more of these three rites. Except in extraordinary circumstances, this

should not be the case. The burial of the body or cremains should take place in a reasonable time after death has occurred. The prayer of the Church is seen as a timely way to say farewell and to offer prayers for the immortal soul of the deceased. To delay the Rites of Christian Burial simply for convenience is inappropriate.

The Vigil (Wake)

At the Vigil, the Christian community keeps watch with the family in prayer to the God of mercy and finds strength in Christ's presence. The Catholic Vigil is a prayer service, usually held the evening before the funeral. The community of friends and family will usually gather for a service at the funeral home/mortuary. In some cases (especially if many people are expected), the Vigil may be held in the church/chapel. The Vigil includes the rosary, scripture readings, homily, and prayer for both the deceased and the grieving family.

In addition, a eulogy may be read at the Vigil. Visitation usually follows the Vigil or Wake, service. The content of the remarks should be about the deceased and need to be respectfully presented. The speaker needs to be mindful that the setting is to be reverent, and only content which is appropriate to that setting should be presented. Nothing contrary to the views of the Catholic Church should ever be presented. The remarks should be personal. Additional readings from Sacred Scripture, secular writings, poetry, book excerpts, etc... can be used at this time.

The Funeral Mass

The core of the Catholic funeral celebration is the Mass. The Eucharist is at the center of the Catholic faith – the celebration of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Scripture readings and prayer also play a prominent role in the Catholic funeral service, along with songs, hymns, and a brief message. The Mass, the memorial of Christ's death and resurrection, is the principal celebration of the Christian funeral. While following the directives of the Church's ritual in planning the liturgical celebration, the choice of music, color of vestments, biblical readings,

and homily should reflect the family's wishes, while emphasizing as well the community aspect of faith, which remains unbroken in death.

The Funeral Mass is customarily celebrated on the day of burial. However, for pastoral reasons the Mass may be celebrated at some other time before the burial, such as the previous evening. In any event, there should be only one Funeral Mass.

Since the proper setting for Mass is a sacred place, Mass is not to be celebrated in a funeral home or similar facility. The body of the deceased should be present in church for the Funeral Mass or "Mass of Christian Burial." The term "Mass of the Resurrection" is incorrect for the Funeral Mass.

Keeping in mind that liturgical roles are to be fulfilled only by Catholics, members of the family who are Catholic are encouraged to assume the role of readers and assist in the offertory procession. They may receive Holy Communion under both species. In accordance with the Church's teaching, Holy Communion is not given to non-Catholics, but they may serve as pallbearers.

The casket remains closed during the Funeral Mass and should be covered with a white pall in remembrance of the baptismal garment. In addition to its liturgical significance, the pall serves a very practical purpose: it avoids ostentation, prevents possible embarrassment of the poor and emphasizes Christians' equality before God.

Apart from distinctions based on sacred orders and the honor due to civic dignitaries, no special honors are paid to any private person or classes of persons, whether in the ceremony or by external display.

The Rite of Committal (Burial/Interment)

In the Catholic faith, there is great respect for the body. Catholics believe that the body is "the temple of the Lord" and that at the End of Days, there will be a resurrection of the body. This service at the

cemetery is the last farewell, in which the Christian community honors one of its members before the body is buried or entombed. With priest and mourners accompanying the body to the cemetery, the rite is celebrated at the grave or tomb or in a cemetery committal chapel.

Whenever possible, those who were part of the Catholic community are buried in a Catholic cemetery. As well as being a sacred place, it recalls the community of all the faithful, living and deceased. When a Catholic is to be interred in other than a Catholic cemetery, the priest will bless the individual space and then follow the usual ritual.

When a non-Catholic is to be buried in a Catholic cemetery, the minister of the deceased's faith community may conduct the burial service according to the minister's own ritual. If the family of the non-Catholic deceased person requests a Catholic priest to conduct the burial service, the priest will celebrate a rite, which is appropriate.

For those involved in civic organizations and those with additional affiliations, patriotic or fraternal services may also be conducted following the burial rite.

OTHER DETAILS

Funeral Liturgy Outside of Mass

The funeral liturgy outside of Mass is ordinarily celebrated in the parish church/chapel, but may be celebrated in the home of the deceased, a funeral home, or in a cemetery chapel. Generally speaking, Mass may not be offered as part of the funeral rites for those not entitled to a Catholic funeral according to Church law. Following careful consideration of the deceased's relationship with the Church, the needs and wishes of the bereaved family, and the attitude of the community, the pastor may offer a funeral liturgy outside Mass. This rite may also be appropriate for a deceased Catholic when no members of the family practice the faith. The body of the deceased should be present for the service.

Even though Mass may not be celebrated as part of the funeral rite in these situations, it may be offered at another time for the repose of the soul of the deceased and for the spiritual well-being of the relatives and friends.

Ecumenical Considerations

When requested by the Catholic relatives of a deceased baptized non-Catholic, a priest may conduct a prayer service for the non-Catholic in a funeral home. In particular circumstances where the deceased non-Catholic was well disposed to the Church, and the family requests Mass, it may be celebrated with the body present in church.

Cremation

In recent years, Catholic funeral practices have been impacted by the increasing popularity of cremation as a means of providing for the final disposition of the body. As a result, a number of burial practices have been embraced by some Catholics, which are not permitted according to the “Order of Christian Funerals.” In order to help in funeral planning and allow you to follow the teachings of the Catholic Church, please review the following principles regarding Cremation in the Catholic Church.

On March 21, 1997, the Holy See granted an indult to *The Order of Christian Funerals*, giving permission to the U.S. Latin-rite bishops to allow the celebration of the funeral liturgy in the presence of cremated remains. This practice was never intended to be viewed as an “equally” good alternative to the traditional funeral rites of the Church, which entail the burial of the body intact. Permission to cremate and to celebrate the funeral liturgy in the presence of cremated remains was intended to be granted on a case-by-case basis. At St. Ann Catholic Church, the pastor will determine what is appropriate in each given situation.

Whenever a family chooses cremation over traditional burial, families should be made aware of the preference to honor the body *before* cremation.

On October 4, 1997, the appendix to *The Order of Christian Funerals* was published for use in the funeral rites involving the presence of the cremated remains. At St. Boniface Parish, the Pastor and/or Deacon, for pastoral reasons, may permit the funeral liturgy to be celebrated in the presence of the cremated remains. However, the following should always be observed:

- The remains should be placed in a worthy vessel.
- The paschal candle should be placed in a prominent position, as it is when the body is present for a funeral.
- Explicit references to baptism must be omitted when blessing the cremated remains.
- A white cloth should *not* be used to cover the cremated remains, as this mimics the practice of draping the funeral pall upon the body, which clearly connects the body to baptism.
- The cremains may be incensed out of respect for the deceased's cremated body.
- The cremated remains may be sprinkled with holy water.

When cremation of the body is chosen, the Church still prefers that the body be cremated *after* the Funeral, thus allowing for the presence of the body at the Funeral Mass. When circumstances require it, however, cremation and committal may take place even before the Funeral liturgy. As mentioned above, most of the usual rites, which are celebrated in the presence of the body of the deceased, may also be celebrated in the presence of the cremated remains. The primary symbols of the Roman Catholic Funeral Liturgy are retained even when the funeral liturgy is celebrated in the presence of the cremated remains. The cremains may be carried in procession and/or placed on a table where the casket normally would be. Photographs and other mementos may be used at the vigil and cemetery, but are not appropriate at the Mass.

The cremated remains of the deceased must be given the same respect as a body is given during the Rite of Committal. A worthy vessel must carry the cremated remains of the deceased to the place of internment. The cremated remains should be buried in a grave or entombed in a mausoleum or columbarium. The practice of scattering ashes over the sea, on the ground, or from the air is not permitted for Catholics and is not considered to be the reverent disposition of the cremated remains.

The cremated remains may be buried at sea as long as they are intact and placed in a worthy vessel that will carry the remains to the bottom of the seabed. Burial of cremated remains at sea should observe all applicable Federal and State laws and regulations.

PLEASE NOTE

Catholics should never retain the cremated remains in their homes, places of work, or any other personal space. Neither should Catholics divide and share the cremated remains of the deceased. The Church requires that the cremated remains be buried or placed in a recognized area of reverence for the dead. If the final disposition of the cremated remains does not take place according to the teaching of the Church with reverence and in a sacred place, the remains will not be permitted to be brought into the Church for the Funeral Liturgy.

Readings

Readings are provided in *The Order of Christian Funerals* to give grieving families an opportunity to hear God speak to them in their fears and in their sorrows, offering hope in the midst of their pain. The biblical readings may never be replaced by non-biblical readings. The Word proclaimed is God's way of speaking to us and can never be replaced by conventional wisdom or poetry.

If the family wishes to use additional readings that are not contained within *The Order of Christian Funerals*, they can do so at the conclusion

of the Vigil for the Deceased, at the conclusion of the Rite of Committal or during the funeral meal.

Two readings may be selected for use during the Funeral Liturgy. These readings are to be chosen from *The Order of Christian Funerals*. The first reading is taken from the Old Testament and the second is selected from the New Testament options. The responsorial psalm should always be sung. The psalm should never be replaced by a regular hymn, which contains no psalmody. The Gospel will be selected by the Presider, unless agreed upon by the Presider and family beforehand. The Gospel may only be proclaimed by a priest or deacon. Only those priests or deacons in good standing, who have been granted faculties by their Diocese in Illinois may celebrate, concelebrate, or preach at a funeral liturgy.

General Intercessions

The General Intercessions are to be taken from *The Order of Christian Funerals*. There may be an addition of one or two personal petitions to the prescribed set, if approved by the Pastor prior to the day of the funeral.

Viewing the Body

This practice is highly encouraged, because it helps remove doubts that the loved one has truly died. The body should be viewed at the funeral home. At the time of the Mass of Christian Burial, the casket is closed; however, viewing may take place in the church/chapel or lobby of the church prior to the Mass. If the vigil/rosary is held in the church/chapel, viewing can take place in the church/chapel before and after the vigil service.

Funeral Mass and Vigil Times

Should be coordinated with the funeral director and the pastor. No funeral Masses may be scheduled for Sundays or holidays. Call the parish office at (815) 467-6962 ext. 10.

Luncheon

You may choose to have the luncheon after the funeral and burial in the parish hall, please contact the parish office at (815) 467-6962 ext. 10. “*Thank You*” notes can also be handed out at this time.

Church Stipend and Fees

Most funeral directors itemize all costs within their billings. This is something that should be discussed with them. Included should be payments for these services:

- Church Stipend
- Priest/Deacon
- Pianist
- Cantor