

## The Order of Christian Funerals

### The Vigil for the Deceased

The vigil for the deceased (or, as it is often called, the wake service) is normally the first of the three funeral rites.

At the vigil, the Christian community gathers in prayer to console and support the grieving family and to intercede with God for the deceased. A priest, deacon, or layperson may preside. The family should clearly be a part of the assembly and not be separated from it by being in a different room.

The vigil usually takes place in the funeral home. It is more appropriate that it take place in the Church, but only at a time well before the funeral liturgy; e.g., the afternoon or evening before the funeral. The vigil may not be combined with the funeral liturgy; this would duplicate the liturgy of the word and/or make the funeral liturgy too long (*Order of Christian Funerals*, OCF, 55).

According to the official liturgical books, the vigil is either a liturgy of the word or part of the office for the dead from the Liturgy of the Hours. Since many people may be unable to attend the funeral liturgy, it is important that the vigil be a coherent liturgical celebration. It should deal realistically with grief while offering the support of Christian faith, hope, and love. There are models for the vigil in the *Order of Christian Funerals*, as well as suggestions for alternative readings and prayers. If the vigil takes place in the church, the reception of the body forms the introductory rites. Whether at the funeral home or in the church, a member of the family may speak in remembrance of the deceased, either before the blessing or at another appropriate time during the vigil.

The assembly's full participation, whether spoken or sung, is as important in celebrating the vigil as it is in any liturgical action. Participation aids and memorial cards provided by funeral directors should be truly tasteful and have prayers reflective of the *Order of Christian Funerals*. Recorded music should not replace "live" music (*Liturgical Music Today*, 60).

If the family requests the rosary, the ministers should respect their wishes. However, the service should still include (the reception of the body, if in Church), a liturgy of the word, with at least an appropriate gospel reading, since the proclamation of the word is the high point and central focus of the vigil (OCF, 22, 59). The rosary is not advisable when many non-Catholics are present; it is best-suited as prayer that gathers a small number of Catholic family and friends.

#### **1. Outline of the Vigil Service (51-97)**

##### **Introductory Rites** (Reception of the Body if at the church)

- Greeting
- Opening Song
- Invitation to Prayer

##### **Liturgy of the Word**

- First Reading
- Responsorial Psalm
- Gospel
- Homily

##### **Prayer of Intercession**

- Litany
- The Lord's Prayer
- Concluding Prayer

##### **Concluding Rite**

- [Reflections] Blessing