



Living for Christ  
ST·MICHAEL CATHOLIC CHURCH

Guideline for Eulogies

06-29-16

The appropriateness of eulogies at the Funeral Mass has been a topic of frequent discussion among priests and liturgists in recent years. The Funeral Liturgy (Mass) does allow for “a friend or family member to speak in remembrance of the deceased” following the prayer after communion and before the final blessing. As with all things related to the Mass, this speaking in remembrance is intended to be in keeping with the tone of the Funeral Liturgy – words that recognize the grief of earthly departure of the person, but also refer to that person’s faith that gives hope about his or her eternal destiny. Further, those words are to be brief. A eulogy does not have the above focus.

A eulogy is generally defined as a speech or writing in praise of a person(s) or thing(s), especially one recently dead or retired. This definition is much broader than what the Church intends by “speak in remembrance.” It leaves undefined questions of the length and the definition of what is praiseworthy in a person, and is silent on who is qualified to speak about issues touching faith and theological doctrine.

Experience has shown that many eulogizers speaking during the Funeral Mass either don’t understand our explanation of the difference between a eulogy and “words of remembrance,” or choose to ignore it. There are some who have spoken against Catholic doctrine, while others have “canonized” their loved one, innocently perhaps, saying they are in heaven, which would mean there is no further need to pray for them. Some have shared personal, vulgar, and immoral behavior of the deceased while trying to be funny. There are others who have spoken well, but for far too long.

The primary purpose of a Catholic Funeral Mass is to pray for the deceased; it is not intended to be a celebration of their life. The secondary purpose of the funeral Mass is for the comfort and hope of loved ones. Some people want a “celebration of life,” and neither our parish nor the Catholic Church is against that. Done well, it can be comforting, and honorable. We encourage people to do that at the wake – maybe even during the Prayer Vigil Service - or at the luncheon after the funeral. These are times when a eulogy would be much more appropriate.

Since it is so difficult to ensure that “words of remembrance” are properly said during the Funeral Mass, speaking about the deceased will be limited to the homilist, with rare exceptions. We have consulted with laity and clergy here and from other parishes to come to this decision. Therefore, a eulogy will not be allowed during the Funeral Mass at St. Michael. If a family or friend wishes to give a eulogy they will be able to do that either at the wake, the visitation prior to Mass (but in all cases ending when the Mass is supposed to begin), or at the funeral luncheon.