



DIocese OF AUSTIN

FUNERALS



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Christian Funeral Rites

By means of the funeral rites, it has been the practice of the Church, as a tender mother, not simply to commend the dead to God but also to raise high the hope of its children and to give witness to its own faith in the future resurrection of the baptized with Christ.

- I. In the face of death, the Church confidently proclaims that God has created each person for eternal life and that Jesus, the Son of God, by his death and resurrection, has broken the chains of sin and death that bound humanity.
- II. Christians celebrate the funeral rites to offer worship, praise and thanksgiving to God for the gift of life, which has now been returned to God, the author of life and the hope of the just.
- III. The celebration of the Christian funeral brings hope and consolation to the living.
 - A. While proclaiming the Gospel of Jesus Christ and witnessing to Christian hope in the resurrection, the funeral rites also recall to all who take part in them God's mercy and judgment and meet the human need to turn always to God in times of crisis (*Order of Christian Funerals* 1,5,7).
- IV. All baptized Catholics have the right to an ecclesiastical burial celebrated according to Church law (c. 1176) (See [X: Denial of Ecclesiastical Funeral Rites](#) (Page Q-5)).
 - A. Catechumens are buried as Christian faithful (c. 1183, § 1; OCF 18).
 - B. Children whose Baptism was intended by their parents, but who died before being baptized, are also to receive Christian burial (c. 1183, § 2).
- V. Every Christian is free to choose their place of burial or repository for ashes (c. 1180).
 - A. The appropriate blessing from the *Order of Christian Funerals* should be prayed over the place of committal, if it has not been already blessed (OCF 218, 405).
 - B. A prayer of praise and thanksgiving is recited over the place of committal if it has already been blessed (OCF 218, 405).

- VI. Christian symbols should be used appropriately at the rites of Christian funerals.
- A. These may include an Easter candle, holy water, incense, fresh flowers, the Book of the Gospels, and/or a cross on the coffin.
 - B. If a pall is used at funerals in which the coffin has been draped with a flag
 1. The flag should be removed before the pall is placed.
 - C. Only Christian symbols may rest on or be placed near the coffin during the funeral liturgy (OCF 35-38).
- VII. The liturgy for the Rites of Christian funerals may take place at several different stations, i.e. the home, the funeral home, the church, the cemetery, and/or a chapel.
- A. Appropriate rites are provided for each (OCF 4-10).
 1. In funerals at funeral homes or cemetery chapels, the Mass can be celebrated with the permission of the Bishop (*Populorum Ordinis*¹, 6; BCL² 13/85).
 2. If the Funeral Rite Outside of Mass is celebrated, a Memorial Mass is to be offered, without the body present, either before or after the funeral rites, within a reasonable time (OCF 6-7).
 3. The celebration of the funeral Mass is forbidden during the Easter Triduum, on solemnities, and on Sundays (OCF 6).
 4. The family of the deceased should be invited to assist in planning the funeral rites and, if possible, should exercise some of the liturgical ministries within the liturgy (OCF 15-17).
 5. Music is integral to the funeral rites and should be chosen with care.
 - a. Music should be provided for the vigil and funeral liturgy and, whenever possible, for the funeral processions and the rite of committal (OCF 30-32).
- VIII. Funeral rites for a baptized person belonging to a non-Catholic church or ecclesial community are allowed, provided this is not clearly contrary to the wishes of the deceased and provided a minister of the faith of the deceased, for whatever reason, is not available (c. 1183, § 2).
- A. When a priest or deacon is asked by the family to officiate at the funeral service and burial of a member of another church, he may do so at the funeral home, the home, or graveside.

¹ Hereafter PO

² *Bishops Committee on the Liturgy Newsletter* (USCCB)

- B. Baptized members of another church or ecclesial community may be buried with funeral rites in the Catholic Church with the permission of the diocesan Bishop (granted by pagella) if a minister of their own is unavailable.
- C. Church funerals for baptized members of other faiths should always be in accordance with their wishes and those of the diocesan Bishop (*Ecumenical Guidelines for the Diocese of Texas*³ 12; OCF 14 bis 2).
- D. As a norm, a deceased non-Catholic would not receive a funeral Mass as part of the funeral rite. However, a funeral Mass can be celebrated if the following conditions are verified:
 - 1. A public celebration of Mass is expressly requested by members of the family, by friends, or subjects of the deceased out of a genuine religious motive.
 - 2. Scandal on the part of the faithful is absent.
 - a. In these cases a public Mass can be celebrated but the name of the deceased is not mentioned in the Eucharistic prayer since that would suppose full communion with the Catholic Church (*Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith*⁴ (June 11, 1976)).
 - 3. Members of other faiths may be buried in a Catholic cemetery and with the clergy of another faith conducting cemetery rites.
 - 4. Members of other faiths may be invited to preach or read from the Scriptures during a funeral service outside the celebration of the Eucharist.

IX. Cremation⁵

- A. Catholic teaching stresses the preference for burial or entombment of the body of the deceased.
 - 1. Likewise, the Church clearly prefers that the body of the deceased be present for the funeral rites.
- B. Those who have chosen cremation may certainly receive a Christian Funeral unless their choice for cremation reflects a denial of the resurrection of the body or is dictated by anti-Christian motives (OCF 15; c. 1176, § 3).
- C. Because the Church prefers the presence of the body for funeral Masses, it is recommended that cremation take place following the funeral Mass.

³ Hereafter EGD

⁴ Hereafter SCDF

⁵ *Reflections on the Body, Cremation and Catholic Funeral Rites* (USCCB, 1997)

- D. When circumstances prevent the presence of the body at the funeral Mass, it is appropriate that the cremated remains be present for the full course of the funeral Mass (*Vigil for the Deceased, Funeral Liturgy, Rite of Committal*).
- E. The cremated remains should be treated with the same respect given to the corporeal remains of the body.
 - 1. The cremated remains should be entombed in a mausoleum or columbarium; they may also be buried in a common grave in a cemetery.
 - 2. The practices of scattering the remains or keeping them in a home are not the reverent disposition that the Church requires⁶.

X. Denial of Ecclesiastical Funeral Rites

Unless there is some sign of repentance before death, the following may be denied church funerals:

- A. Notorious apostates
- B. Heretics, schismatics
- C. Manifest sinners
- D. Those who chose cremation in opposition to the Christian faith (c. 1184)

XI. Compassion at Time of a Death

- A. A family requesting a funeral service is usually distraught and grief-filled. It should not be made difficult for them to bury their loved one.
 - 1. Priests and deacons should be generous in accommodating families even if the deceased is no longer a parishioner or the funeral is requested on the priest's day off (BCL 2/17/92, 8/94).

⁶ *Reflections on the Body, Cremation and Catholic Funeral Rites* (USCCB, 1997)