



PLANNING THE FUNERAL

The priest or a pastoral staff person should be consulted before any liturgical arrangements are made with the funeral director. This provides the opportunity to have a clear understanding of the meaning and significance of the rites, as well as for family members to participate in the rites themselves. The arrangements will then need to be confirmed with the funeral director.

SELECTION OF SCRIPTURE READINGS

The family and friends under the direction of the parish staff person choose the Scripture readings that most closely reflect the particular circumstances and needs of the mourners.

SELECTION OF MUSIC

Music is integral to the funeral rites. It allows the community to express convictions and feelings that words alone may fail to convey. It has the power to console and uplift the mourners and to strengthen the unity of the assembly in faith and love (OCF #30). Since music can evoke strong feelings, appropriate music for the celebration of the funeral rites should be chosen with great care. The parish hymnal is an excellent resource for this purpose. Secular or pre-recorded music is not appropriate within the liturgy; however, secular songs important to the deceased might be included during the reception or other family gatherings.

CREMATION

Although the preference of the Catholic Church is for burial of the full body, the Church has permitted cremation since 1963, except when it is evident that cremation was chosen for anti-Christian motives. When cremation is chosen, one of the following options is used:

CREMATION AFTER THE FUNERAL LITURGY

When cremation is chosen, the Church strongly prefers that the cremation take place after the liturgy and that the body of the deceased be present during the funeral rites (OCF #418). The presence of the human body more clearly brings to mind the life and death of that person, and better expresses the values that the Church affirms in its funeral rites. When cremation follows the liturgy, the Funeral Liturgy and other rites are celebrated as described under Funeral Rites.

FUNERAL LITURGY IN THE PRESENCE OF THE CREMATED REMAINS

The Holy See authorized the bishops of the United States to allow the celebration of a Funeral Liturgy in the presence of the cremated remains of the body. The cremated remains of the body are to be treated with the same respect given to the human body. Prior to the Funeral Mass or as a part of the entrance procession of the Mass, a worthy vessel containing the cremated remains is carried with reverence into the church. The cremated remains are placed on a suitable stand or table in the place normally occupied by the coffin. The Mass begins with the sprinkling of holy water; however, a pall is not placed over the cremated remains. The Funeral Mass is celebrated as described above. Following the Prayer after Communion, the Final Commendation takes place as usual.

CREMATION AND COMMITTAL PRIOR TO THE FUNERAL LITURGY

When the body is cremated and committed soon after death, the rites of Final Commendation and Committal are used at the appropriate times, even though occurring prior to the Funeral Liturgy. The Vigil and other rites are also adapted as necessary. Following the Committal, the family and friends of the deceased join the community in celebrating the Funeral Liturgy. After Communion, the blessing is given and the people are dismissed.

PROPER INTERMENT OF CREMATED REMAINS

The Church teaches that cremated remains must be treated with the same respect as the body of the deceased. The principle of respect for the cremated remains embraces the deeper belief in the individuality that each baptized person has before God. Respectful final disposition of cremated remains involves interment or entombment in the consecrated grounds of a cemetery. Burial options include a family grave marked with a traditional memorial, or interment in an urn garden or crypt within the cemetery that is especially for burial of the urn with an appropriate stone or bronze memorial. Practices such as placing the cremated remains on the ground or in a body of water, keeping the cremated remains in a home of a relative or friend, or burying remains in places other than consecrated ground are not in keeping with the reverent disposition of what the Church requires. The *Order of Christian Funerals* calls for cremated remains be interred with the same dignity as is afforded the full body.

PREPARING FOR A CATHOLIC FUNERAL

In the dioceses of the United States, the principal rituals in the Order of Christian Funerals are the Vigil for the Deceased, the Funeral Mass, and the Rite of Christian Burial. The Funeral Mass is the central liturgy of the Christian funeral in the Archdiocese of San Francisco.

The Eucharist is the heart of the Paschal reality of Christian death (*Catechism of the Catholic Church* #1689). In the celebration of the Eucharist, the Church most perfectly expresses her communion with those who have died. The celebration of the Eucharist at the funeral is an opportunity for the community of the faithful and the family to "learn to live in communion with the one who has 'fallen asleep in the Lord,' by communicating the Body of Christ of which he is a living member and, then, by praying for him and with him" (CCC #1689).

The Catholic community wishes to stand with the family and friends in this difficult time. This information is provided to assist you in the process of planning and celebrating the Funeral Liturgy (and/or the Vigil service) of your loved one.

Our Catholic funeral rites are intended to bring hope and consolation to the living, while proclaiming and witnessing our faith in the Resurrection. Christian hope faces the reality of death and the anguish of grief but trusts in God's mercy and victory over death. Our funeral rites strive to meet the human need to turn always to God in times of crisis as well as pray for the deceased.



THE VIGIL FOR THE DECEASED

The Vigil for the Deceased is often the first time that family, friends, and members of the parish community gather in remembrance of the deceased for prayer and support. The Vigil centers on listening to the Word of the Lord from Sacred Scripture, psalms, prayer, and song. The priest or deacon may give a brief homily, though a trained lay minister may also preside. The Vigil should be celebrated either in the home of the deceased, in the mortuary, or in the church as soon as possible between the time of death and the Funeral Liturgy, ordinarily on the day or evening before the Funeral Mass. The Vigil (not the Funeral Mass) is the preferred time for individuals to share remembrances of the deceased, with an emphasis on trust in God's mercy and hope for eternal life, more than simply the telling of stories. Devotions such as the Rosary may also be included. If organizations wish to give honor to the deceased this should take place at the end of the Vigil.

ORDER OF SERVICE

The Vigil consists of the Introductory Rites, the Liturgy of the Word, the Prayer of Intercession, and a Concluding Rite.



THE FUNERAL LITURGY

In preparation for the Funeral Liturgy, the family should meet with the priest or parish staff person to select the day and time of the Funeral as well as the Scripture readings and hymns. The Funeral Liturgy is the central liturgical celebration of the Christian community for the deceased. At the Funeral Liturgy the community gathers with the family and friends of the deceased to give praise and thanks to God for Christ's victory over sin and death, to commend the deceased to God's tender mercy and compassion, and to seek strength in the proclamation of the Paschal Mystery. When one of the Church's members dies, it is encouraged that the highest form of prayer, the Mass, is celebrated.

The Funeral Liturgy is celebrated in four parts:

The first is the **Greeting** at the entrance of the church. The casket (or urn, in the case of cremation) is sprinkled with holy water as a reminder of the deceased's Baptism. The pall is then placed on the casket, a reminder of the baptismal garment that symbolized life in Christ. The casket is then led to the front of the church with family following. While words of remembrance are best suited at the Vigil, a family member may speak briefly prior to the Opening Prayer, enabling those present to connect their loss with the mystery of faith and eternal life in the life of *this* Christian. It is best to review these words in advance with the priest. The priest then recites the Opening Prayer.

The celebration then enters the second part, the **Liturgy of the Word**. Typically, readings are taken from the Old Testament, a Responsorial Psalm (intoned by the cantor), a second reading from the New Testament, an Alleluia (or other Acclamation during Lent), and a Gospel selection, followed by a homily presented by the presider. "The reading of the Word of God is an essential element of the celebration of the Funeral Liturgy. The readings proclaim the Paschal Mystery, teach remembrance of the dead, convey the hope of being gathered together again in God's kingdom, and encourage the witness of Christian life. Above all, the readings tell of God's design for a world in which suffering and death will relinquish their hold on all whom God has called his own" (*Order of Christian Funerals* #137). Following the homily, the Universal Prayers are presented.

In part three of the Funeral Liturgy, the **Liturgy of the Eucharist** is celebrated in the usual manner.

Following the Post Communion Prayer, part four concludes the Funeral Liturgy: the **Final Commendation**. These prayers are a final farewell by the members of the community, and the deceased is entrusted to God's mercy. The body of the deceased is incensed during the Song of Farewell and the Prayer of Commendation concludes the rite. The procession is formed and the casket is carried to the place of burial.

THE RITE OF COMMITTAL

The Rite of Committal is the final ritual of the community of faith in caring for the body or cremated remains of the deceased member (OCF #204). By their presence at this rite, the community helps the mourners face the end of one relationship with the deceased and the beginning of a new one based on prayerful remembrance, gratitude, and the hope of resurrection and reunion. It is celebrated at the graveside, mausoleum or cemetery chapel by a priest, deacon, brother, woman religious or layperson.

ORDER OF SERVICE

The Rite of Committal consists of the Invitation to Prayer, Scripture Verse, Prayer over the Place of Committal, Committal, Intercessions, the Lord's Prayer, Concluding Prayer, and the Prayer over the People.

SPECIAL CIRCUMSTANCES

FUNERAL LITURGY WITHOUT MASS

In certain circumstances, the Funeral Liturgy may be celebrated without the Mass. In the Funeral Liturgy without Mass the community gathers to hear the message of Easter hope proclaimed in the Liturgy of the Word and to commend the deceased to God. This liturgy may appropriately be called "The Funeral Service." The Funeral Service shares the following elements with the Funeral Mass: Introductory Rites, Liturgy of the Word, the Final Commendation, and the Procession to the place of committal. In this case, it may be celebrated at a funeral home, cemetery chapel or another suitable place approved by the Archdiocese.

MILITARY HONORS

Military honors surrounding the funeral rites may be included for those who have served in the armed forces. The flag should be removed in the vestibule of the church prior to the greeting by the priest and the covering with the pall. Military honors (flag folding, *Taps*, etc) may be done at the conclusion of the liturgy, after the Prayer after Communion and the Final Commendation, prior to exiting the church.

CHILDREN WHO HAVE DIED BEFORE BAPTISM

The *Order of Christian Funerals* provides funeral rites for children who died before Baptism.

SUICIDE

Funeral rites may be offered in cases of suicide. Families grieving the loss of a love one due to a suicide need the pastoral care of the Church and her ministers.

NON-PRACTICING CATHOLICS

By virtue of one's Baptism, a Catholic is eligible for the funeral rites of the Church. Parish ministers may assist in determining the appropriate selection of rites and manner of celebration.

