

The Order of Christian Funerals

Our Catholic faith, a faith that is rooted in the dying and rising of Christ, gives the Catholic funeral a unique character. The Funeral rites are celebrated to offer worship, praise and thanksgiving to God for the gift of the life of the deceased who now has been returned to God. The rites also bring hope and consolation to the living who, by faith, believe that death is a transition from life to eternal life.

Catholic Funeral Rites

According to the Catholic *Order of Christian Funerals* (OCF), there are three rites that correspond to the three principal ritual moments in the Funeral of Christians. They are:

The Vigil for the Deceased, The Funeral Liturgy, The Rite of Committal.

❖ Vigil for the Deceased

The Vigil for the Deceased is the rite to be used in the time following death and before the Funeral liturgy, or if there is no Funeral liturgy, before the Rite of Committal. It should not be omitted or replaced by devotional prayers (*eg. the rosary, litanies, favorite prayers, etc*). Devotional prayers may be offered in addition to the celebration of the Vigil for the Deceased either at the time of the Vigil itself, or at another time. The Vigil for the Deceased may be lead by a priest, deacon, or trained lay minister.

❖ Funeral Liturgy

The Funeral Liturgy is the central liturgical celebration of the Christian community for the deceased. There are two forms of the Funeral Liturgy: the Funeral Mass or the Funeral Liturgy outside Mass (*which may be lead by a deacon or a trained lay minister*). 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, the dying and rising of Christ.

▪ Words of Remembrance

The OCF is very clear that "a brief homily should be given at the funeral liturgy, but never any kind of eulogy" to replace the homily (OCF, 141). This does not mean that the deceased cannot be spoken about in the homily, but that the Word of God must be primary. The homilist speaks the scriptural word that helps the assembly understand that the mystery of the death and resurrection of Jesus is operative in the life and death of the deceased.

Each parish determines its own policy regarding whether speaking "in remembrance of the deceased" will be permitted at the Funeral Liturgy. If the parish permits, after the Prayer after Communion, a member of the family or a friend may speak "in remembrance of the deceased" before the Final Commendation begins. This needs to be arranged with the presider a day or two ahead of time, not minutes before the Funeral Liturgy.

If "words of remembrance" are permitted by the parish, use the following guidelines:

- The person giving the remembrance should be Catholic.
- Only one person may speak (unless the words must be translated into an additional language for the benefit of the assembly).
- The remembrance should be brief; no more than 5 minutes.

- The remembrance should be well prepared by the friend/family member ahead of time so that it is focused, and does not exceed 5 minutes. It should speak about how the life of the deceased showed forth the good works of a Christian. If possible, a copy of the remembrance is to be given to the presider ahead of time so that it may be reviewed before the Funeral Liturgy.
- The *Order of Christian Funerals* also permits speaking “in remembrance of the deceased” at the Vigil for the Deceased and/or at the Rite of Committal.

❖ **Rite of Committal**

The Rite of Committal is the final act of the community of faith in caring for the body of its deceased member. There are two forms to this rite:

- Rite of Committal – used when the Final Commendation is celebrated as part of the conclusion of the Funeral liturgy.
- Rite of Committal with Final Commendation – used when the Final Commendation does not take place during the Funeral liturgy or when no Funeral liturgy precedes the Committal Rite.

Cremation

Since 1997 the Catholic bishops in the United States have been given permission to allow the cremated remains of the deceased to be present during the Funeral rites, including the Funeral Mass. However, the bishop of each diocese determines if this option may be used in his diocese. In the Archdiocese of Santa Fe, permission has been given. Please talk with your pastor, if this is your choice.

However, the Church *strongly prefers* that cremation take place *after* the full Funeral liturgy with the body of the deceased present. However, when this is not possible, the Funeral rites of the Church may take place in the presence of the cremated remains. The cremated remains are to be treated with the same reverence as the body of the deceased, including the use of a worthy vessel for the ashes and care and attention to the placement of the vessel at all times especially, during the Funeral rites.

The cremated remains of a Catholic should be buried in a grave or entombed in a mausoleum or columbarium. Scattering ashes, dividing of ashes, or keeping cremated remains in a home are not the reverent disposition that the Church requires.

Parish Planning

When a parishioner dies, the family or funeral home calls the parish to set the date and time for the Funeral rites. An appointment is usually made for the family to meet with a member of the parish staff. This is when your family can present the parish with your completed Funeral rites worksheets. At this time, it is also helpful if the family brings a brief biography to help the homilist and prayer leaders to “know” the life of the deceased.

If you prefer, and the parish will accept it, you may file a copy of your funeral plans and your biography with the parish office for ready reference.

PREPARING CATHOLIC FUNERAL RITES

I. VIGIL FOR THE DECEASED

Location _____ Time _____

Desired Prayer Leader _____
(*may be a priest, deacon, or trained lay minister*)

Gathering Song _____

Scripture Readings 1st reading _____ Lector _____
Psalm _____ Cantor or Lector _____
Gospel _____ Prayer Leader _____

Words of Remembrance (*optional*) ___ Yes ___ No Who will speak? _____

Meditation Music (*optional*) ___ Yes ___ No What song? _____

Closing Song _____

Will there be any devotional prayer before/after the Vigil? (*optional*) ___ Who will lead it? _____

II. FUNERAL LITURGY (Select ___ with Mass or ___ outside of Mass)

Location _____ Time _____

Desired Presider _____

Desired Music Leader/Cantor/Choir _____

Gathering Song _____

First Reading (OT) _____ Lector _____

Responsorial Psalm _____ Lector/Cantor _____

Second Reading (NT) _____ Lector _____

Gospel Acclamation (*sung*) _____

Gospel (*Deacon or Presider*) _____

Words of Remembrance (*optional*) ___ Yes ___ No Who will speak? _____

Final Commendation Song _____

Closing Song _____

(If a Funeral Mass is celebrated, the following may also be planned)

Gift Bearers *(two is usually sufficient)* _____

Preparation of the Gifts Song _____

Communion Song _____

III. The Rite of Committal

Location _____ Time _____

Desired Prayer Leader _____
(may be a priest, deacon, or trained lay minister)

Desired Music *(optional)* _____

Words of Remembrance *(optional)* ____ Yes ____ No Who will speak? _____

Sign/Gesture of Leave-Taking *(optional)* ____ Yes ____ No What gesture? _____

Special Requests

If you have any special requests regarding the reverent celebration of the Catholic Funeral rites, please list them here. *(eg. pallbearers, memorial display with photos, memorial booklets, prayer cards, in lieu of flowers, give donations in honor of the deceased to _____, etc.)*

Other Helpful Information

It is helpful to family members if the following is readily available to them:

- Location of these funeral plans, mortuary and cemetery choices, any pre-paid funeral plans
- Location of important personal and financial documents, including will, trust, etc.
- List of relatives, friends and other people and organizations to be contacted at time of death, including their phone numbers and/or e-mail addresses
- A brief personal biography which describes your life, your values, your beliefs, and the legacy you would like to share with future generations.