



Bishop's Reflection for the Month of November 2019

“Eternal rest grant unto them O Lord”

Traditionally, the Church has set aside the month of November as a time to remember all who have died; the holy ones on November 1st, All Saints' Day; and November 2nd, All Souls' Day, (Dia de Los Muertos) as we remember all the faithful departed.

The Church teaches that praying for the dead is a Spiritual Work of Mercy and burying the dead is a Corporal Work of Mercy. Both are noble means of honoring and respecting those who have died.

As baptized Catholics, the Church, in her care for us, gives us the gift known as the Rite of Christian Burial. The Rite consists of three parts: the Vigil Service, the Mass of Christian Burial and the Committal Service.

As a family meets with their parish priest and/or staff member, the funeral home and cemetery personnel, it is important in planning the funeral that the family honors and respects the wishes of their loved ones who have died. It is encouraged that family members responsible for making the funeral plans are properly catechized by parish and/or the cemetery staff about the Catholic traditions regarding funerals. It is an opportune time for the Church to minister, teach and evangelize those who approach the Church during this time of need.

In our day and age, it is evident that many do not understand the value in the Church's sacred traditions directed to the faithful departed. Unchurched Catholics seem to want to take care of things as soon as possible. Some have no intention of offering a Mass for the repose of the soul of their loved ones. They would rather have a 'Memorial Service,' or a "Celebration of Life." Many times, no mention of God, prayer, salvation, resurrection, heaven, etc. is taken into consideration. That is why it is important to have trained individuals assist and guide family members in order to go through the Rite of Christian Burial with them.

Explaining the difference between "having a Rosary" the evening before the funeral versus the significance of the Vigil can be of great assistance. Personally involving the family in planning the liturgy and the funeral Mass, by selecting the readings and music, can help in the bereavement process. Also, informing the family of the proper place, time and content for the eulogy can be very important.

Clergy in preparing their homilies have a great responsibility of integrating the life of the deceased with the scriptural readings and the Paschal Mystery, that is, the Life, Death and Resurrection of Jesus. The homily is not a time to "canonize" the deceased, but to prayerfully remind the faithful of the importance of living a life centered in Christ, Jesus and focusing on heaven, our final destiny

Finally, when the family arrives at the cemetery for the Committal, the gravesite service, it can be a highly emotional experience of the Rite of Christian Burial. Cultural traditions can be taken into consideration at the gravesite so as to offer pastoral comfort to the mourners; there is the offering of flowers, maybe a devotional song, words of remembrance, the releasing of a handful of soil upon the casket, etc. All these traditions can help the family to experience a sense of closure and farewell.

My friends, all that has been mentioned can help in offering an opportunity to evangelize families who are in need of compassion. As the body of Christ, we the Church, are the ones who can offer them an experience of “encounter” with the grace and mercy of the Risen Christ. It is Jesus who will lift them up and comfort them, all because we have been present and have accompanied our brothers and sisters in their time of need.

“Eternal rest grant unto them O Lord.

And let perpetual light shine upon them.

May they rest in peace.

May their souls, and the souls of all the faithful departed, through the mercy of God, rest in peace.”

Amen.

In the Peace of Christ,

Bishop Cotta

