

Planning a Funeral St. James the Greater Parish

Eau Claire, Wisconsin



Preparing Your Funeral

For many people, I am sure, the thought of preparing their funeral is not a pleasant one. It is natural to fear death and put thoughts of it as far out of reach as possible. It should be no surprise, however, that

what is an understandable and natural reaction is not what our faith dictates. We are a people belonging to a religion founded on the singular world-changing event of Resurrection. In the face of death, the Church confidently proclaims that God has created each person for eternal life and that Jesus, by his death and resurrection, has broken the chains of sin and death and opened for us the way to salvation. Although funerals are very emotion-filled moments, they can also be moments of great faith in a God who has given us new life through the resurrection of his Son.

Planning your funeral does not have to be a depressing event. If you can muster the courage, it is a great spiritual exercise to deepen your appreciation of the meaning of your life. As Pope John Paul II said again and again to the world's youth, "Be not afraid!"

In his book *Our Greatest Gift*, Henri Nouwen tells of the remarkable good that a person can do for others by dying well—it is indeed the greatest gift we can give. It is one thing to simply speak the words of our creed that "we believe in the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come," and quite another thing to walk bravely with that faith into our last days. For others to be near a person of faith who openly embraces the

coming of death is a great privilege. Being with such ones can teach us how to trust in God in a direct and powerful way that simple words cannot. As the saying goes, faith is caught not taught.

It is my hope that this pamphlet will help you reflect on the meaning and depth of your life in Christ, as well as answer many practical questions that you might have. Briefly, here is the structure of what follows:

- I. The flow of the three funeral rites (vigil, funeral mass, committal)
- II. Common questions:
 - What is the usual process or timeline for preparing a funeral?
 - What can friends and family do in the funeral liturgy?
 - What about cremation?
 - Why is it important to bury a person's body or cremated remains in a cemetery?
 - How do I get space in a cemetery?
 - What about eulogies or speakers at a funeral?
 - Will I need casket bearers?
 - How is music selected?
 - What about having a lunch after the funeral mass?
 - What does a funeral home provide for me?

The Three Funeral Rites: The Vigil, the Funeral Liturgy, and the Rite of Committal

The church gives us three distinct moments of structured prayer, with three different purposes. Briefly, the vigil is meant to be a time of adjusting to the reality of death as friends and family gather for support on the night before the funeral liturgy. The funeral mass is a time to proclaim Christian hope and resurrection faith. The rite of committal is a time for saying good-bye.



As rites of the Church, these three moments should be open to all people to attend. There seems to be a trend of having “family only” prayer services at the funeral home before the public visitation begins. Such family prayer time is a beautiful idea, but it should complement, not replace, the vigil prayer service. No one grieves more than family members when someone dies, yet many others in the parish and wider community often seek the opportunity to come and pray for the deceased. Having the vigil, funeral liturgy and committal times announced publicly gives the wider community the chance to grieve with the family and pray for their friend.

Of the three funeral rites, the vigil is probably the least understood from a religious point of view. I cannot tell you how often as a priest my arrival at the funeral home for the vigil prayer service is the cue for a mass exodus of people to their cars for their drive home. That’s too bad, because the vigil prayer service is a great

opportunity for the wider community to support one another and especially the family during this time when they are suffering shock at the fact of death. The vigil is an informal time of gathering and support, often with a mix of tears and laughter as people remember the one they knew and loved. Here the mercy of God is the overall context of the night but not the focus, which is more appropriately on the grief of people, the signs of love and support and the stories that are told. In 1969 the Church gave us the vigil service in its current form that features readings from scripture, a brief homily, and several prayers said both by the presider and the assembly. Ideally, family and friends use this time to share memories and stories about the person who died. A more elaborate eulogy is also better given at this time than at the funeral mass, as I will explain shortly. I always allow time for this storytelling after the brief homily.



“What about the rosary?” you might ask. Before 1969 and the formulation of the vigil rite, rosaries often served as the way to pray with one another on the night before the funeral. While beautiful, this is no longer the norm. A rosary could be prayed by the family before the visitors arrive, or at another time during the evening, separate from the vigil prayer service. If it is really important to the family to include the rosary in the prayer service, we could certainly pray a decade of it within the vigil prayer, but we should not substitute the rosary for the vigil service.



The funeral liturgy (mass) is our great “Thank You” to God who created us, died and rose for us, and is calling each of us back to Himself. In moving from the Vigil to

the Funeral Liturgy, then, the focus shifts from emphasis on the deceased to God's saving works in Jesus Christ. Here we emphasize the saving death and resurrection of Jesus that makes possible our own resurrection. At the same time, we are commending a unique and beloved person to God's care and so the life of this person is also appropriately mentioned in prayers and the homily. The common sense rule is not to make the funeral either too much about Jesus or too much about the person who died, but to strike a balance, or, best, to remember the person in the light of Jesus. It is for this reason that eulogies, talks given by a friend or family member about the life of the person who died, are not encouraged in Catholic funerals. As I mentioned earlier, the perfect place for a eulogy is not within the Funeral Mass but at the Funeral Vigil or wake.

Interestingly, in Canada the bishops have expressly forbidden eulogies from being part of the funeral mass, while here in the U.S. they are allowed but not encouraged. The reason for discouraging eulogies is that it disturbs the flow of the mass. The people have heard the Word of God in all its hope, a homily that honors a unique life and the saving power of the Risen Christ, and then our communion is shared, a communion that is with God, with each other, and with the person whose soul we are commending to God. After communion, the next movement of the liturgy is the "Prayer of Final Commendation." So, it is a rhythm of getting rooted in the Word of Hope, hearing how that affects the unique life of the person who died, solidifying our hope with our communion, and then, having gained confidence in God's saving power through these actions, commending the person to God's merciful embrace. Injecting a eulogy into this flow too often destroys this spiritual flow with light-hearted

stories that, while beautiful in themselves, serve to shift the tone of the service from sacred to secular. Still, I realize that many people imagine the eulogy at this time, and so we do allow for a eulogy after communion. If a eulogy is given, it should be no longer than ten minutes and preferably shorter. Too many eulogies or too long of one can make the proclamation of God's Word and the Eucharist seem like insignificant preludes.



The rite of committal, the last and the conclusion of the funeral rites, is celebrated at the grave. It is the final act of the community of faith in caring for the body or remains of its deceased member. In its farewell, the community expresses the hope that the deceased, along with all who have gone before us marked with the sign of faith, now awaits the glory of the resurrection. It is a sign of the communion that exists between the Church on earth and the Church in heaven (Communion of Saints). The person who died passes with our farewell prayers into the welcoming company of those who now see God face to face.

The rite of committal marks the separation in this life of the mourners from the deceased. The act of committal itself is a stark and powerful expression of this separation. Because of the machinery and time required to lower the casket into the ground, this is usually not done until after all the people leave, but you could arrange to witness the lowering with the funeral director if that is your wish. In committals with cremated remains, the lowering of the urn into the ground is much easier and I recommend that someone from the family or the minister do this, after which others are invited to approach the grave and rub some

dirt from the interior onto the urn. However it occurs, a prayerful rite of committal can help the mourners face the end of one relationship with the person they knew and loved and begin a new one based on prayerful remembrance, gratitude, and the hope of resurrection and reunion.



Some of the prayers in the committal service can give the impression that the person who has died has to wait in the ground until a later time when God will raise him or her up. For example, when we bless the grave we often say “Grant that our brother/sister may sleep here in peace until You awaken him/her to glory.” At the same time, we have prayers that suggest the person is already with God, such as the invitation prayer, “Our brother/sister has gone to his/her place of rest in the peace of Christ. May the Lord now welcome him/her to the table of God’s children in heaven.” So, is the person with God now or later? The answer is yes and yes. You see, our doctrine tries to synthesize the references to resurrection and life after death in the Bible, which are written from different perspectives. As a result, we teach that there is both a “particular judgment” when immediately after death the soul is judged, and, we pray, enters into the loving embrace of God. Then, “later” (I put it in quotes because there is no passing of time in eternity) a “general judgment” occurs “on the last day” when there is a general resurrection when our souls and bodies are miraculously rejoined and the whole of creation comes its fulfillment. To the extent that there is any “waiting,” it would be the soul that waits in heaven for its glorious reunion with the body on the last day. It is because of the anticipation for the resurrection of the body on the last day that we bury bodies so that if they sat up they

would be facing east, the direction of the rising sun, resurrection. While this may be confusing, the beauty of this teaching is that it honors both our individual encounter with God after death as well as the notion central to a Catholic spirituality, that we are not saved alone but saved as a People.

Choosing the Readings for the Funeral Liturgy

The Church offers several options for the readings during the funeral mass. The family may choose passages of Scripture that are not included in these options, but should be mindful that the readings are meant to proclaim the experience of faith in the face of death, and that, just like Sunday masses, we proclaim one Old Testament reading, one non-Gospel New Testament Reading, and one Gospel reading. Readings not from the Bible should not be proclaimed as part of the funeral's liturgy of the word.

Here are the readings the Church suggests. Included are a brief summary of the reading and the citation if you want to look up the full text. Readings with asterisks (*) next to them are ones that are most commonly chosen. Perhaps that will make your choices easier.



Old Testament Readings:

Job 19:1,23-27

This reading speaks of the longing to see God and confidence that “my redeemer lives.”

Wisdom 3:1-9*

“The Souls of the Just are in the hand of God...they are in peace.” Reference to gold being purified makes it especially appropriate for ones who have undergone much suffering.



Wisdom 4:7-15

This deals with the death of a younger person who nonetheless had lived fully the life God intended.

Isaiah 25:6a, 7-9*

The most positive of all the O.T. readings, Isaiah writes of the day when God will wipe away the tears from all faces and all God's People will rejoice and say “Let us...be glad that he has saved us!”

Lamentations 3:17-26

This expresses both deep grief and depression in the first half and then shifts toward a vision of hope, concluding in silence with the line “It is good to hope in silence for the saving help of the Lord.”

Daniel 12:1-3

Daniel's vision of the end time, it features a potentially disturbing image when he says “others shall be an everlasting horror and disgrace,” but it ends beautifully with “the wise” shining brightly like the stars forever.

II Maccabees 12:43-46

This speaks of a man's piety in providing money so that the dead would be prayed for in Jerusalem.

New Testament Readings:

Acts 10:34-43

Summarizes the saving life, death and resurrection of Jesus and concludes that everyone who believes in him will have forgiveness of sins in His name.



Romans 5:5-11

Hope does not disappoint. Jesus proved his love for us by giving his life for us while we were sinners, enemies of God.

Romans 5:17-21

Just as we were separated from God by the sin of one man, Adam, so has the righteous act of Jesus gained reconciliation and life for all.

Romans 6:3-9*

As we have died with Christ in our baptism, so we will also rise with him. "Christ, raised from the dead, dies no more; death no longer has power over him."

Romans 8:14-23*

We are God's children. The sufferings of this present time are nothing compared to the glory to come.

Romans 8:31b-35, 37-39*

If God is for us, who can be against us? Nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus.

Romans 14:7-9, 10b-12

Whether we live or die we are the Lord's. Each one must give an account of his or her life to God.

I Corinthians 15:20-23, 24b-28

As in Adam all died, so in Christ all will live. Jesus will take dominion over all enemies, including death and then "God will be all in all."



I Corinthians 15:51-57

A trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised, and we will understand the words "Death where is your sting?"

II Corinthians 4:14-5:1*

We know God will raise us just as he raised Jesus. As our outer self wastes away our inner self is renewed each day. We look not to what is seen but to what is unseen.

II Corinthians 5:1, 6-10

Our earthly bodies are mere tents, and while in our bodies we are away from the Lord. So take courage! We will all appear before the judgment seat of Christ to give an account of our lives.

Philippians 3:20-21

Our true home is heaven. The Lord will change our lowly bodies to be like his own glorified body.

I Thessalonians 4:13-18*

We do not want to grieve as if we had no hope. When the Lord returns the dead will rise, and the living will be caught up in the clouds and meet the Lord in the air.

II Timothy

If we have died with him we will also live with him. But if we deny him, he will also deny us.

I John 3:1-2*

God loves us so much as to call us his children. We do not know what heaven will be like, but we know we will see God as he really is.

I John 3:14-16

We know that we have passed from death to life because of the way we love each other.

Revelation 14:13

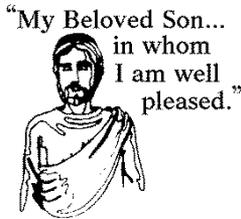
Blest are those who die in the Lord. Let them rest from their labors for their good deeds go with them.

Revelation 20:11—21:1

Judgment at the end of time. All whose names were not written in the book of life are thrown into pool of fire.

Revelation 21:1-5a, 6b-7*

A vision of a New Heaven and a New Earth. The old order has passed away. Jesus is the Alpha and the Omega, beginning and end. He will make all things new.

**Gospel Readings:****Matthew 5:1-12a*** (The Beatitudes)

Blessed are the poor in spirit; blessed those who mourn, who show mercy, who thirst for righteousness...their reward in heaven will be great!

Matthew 11:25-30

What God has hidden from the wise and learned, he has revealed to children. Jesus invites us to come to him for rest because his yoke is easy and his burden is light.

Matthew 25:1-13

The virgin bridesmaids await the entrance of the groom who is delayed. Those who had enough oil in their lamps are ready when the groom arrives, and they enter the feast. Those without enough oil go out to get some and are gone and locked out when the groom arrives.

Matthew 25:31-46

Those who will “inherit the Kingdom” are those who fed the hungry, visited the sick and clothed the naked. “Whatsoever you did for the least of my people you did for me,” says the Lord.

Mark 15:33-39; 16:1-6

The death of Jesus on the cross and the astonishing news three days later that his body is not in the tomb.

Luke 7:11-17

Jesus observes a funeral procession at the death of a widow's only son. With his compassion and power, he resuscitates the woman's son.

Luke 12:35-40

Be like servants awaiting your master's return. If he returns and finds you ready, he will put on the apron and wait on you!

Luke 23:33, 39-43

Jesus' conversation with the two men crucified next to him, culminating with the line "This day you will be with me in paradise."

Luke 23:44-46, 50, 52-53; 24:1-6a

Luke's account of Jesus' death and the scene at the tomb three days later when the women are asked "Why do you seek the living among the dead?"

Luke 24:13-35

The Road to Emmaus. Disciples who are discouraged by Jesus' death suddenly recognize him when he breaks bread with them at table and then run back in joy to tell the others that Jesus is alive.

John 5:24-29

Whoever believes in Jesus has passed from death to life. Soon all in the tombs will hear his voice and those who did good deeds will come to the resurrection of life, while those who have done wicked deeds will come to the resurrection of condemnation.

John 6:37-40

We are the ones the Father has given to Jesus to care for, and he will not lose anything that the Father has given but will raise it on the last day. (This is among the most optimistic of the choices.)

John 6:51-58

Whoever eats the flesh and drinks the blood of Jesus will have eternal life and Jesus will raise that person on the last day. (This is especially fitting for people devoted to Mass and Eucharist.)

John 11:17-27

Jesus speaks with Martha after the death of her brother Lazarus. He asks her if she believes in the Resurrection and then asserts "I am the Resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me...will never die.

John 11:32-45

Jesus speaks with Martha's sister Mary after the death of her brother. When Jesus sees her pain, he weeps with her. Then they lead him to Lazarus's tomb and he calls the dead man out of his tomb. Lazarus comes out.

John 12:23-26

Unless a grain of wheat falls to the earth and dies it remains just a grain of wheat, but if it dies it bears much fruit.

John 14:1-6

Jesus tries to soothe his apostles who fear his departure. He tells them not to be troubled and promises that in his Father's house there are many mansions and he will go and prepare a place for them.

John 17:24-26

Jesus' prayer to the Father asking that they be brought to faith and know the same love of that Jesus himself feels from the Father.

John 19:17-18, 25-30

John's account of Jesus' death. He makes sure that his mother is taken care of by his beloved disciple and then proclaims "It is finished."



Common questions

What is the usual process or timeline for preparing a funeral?

Usually what happens is that a funeral director is notified by the health care professionals, and the body is held at the funeral home where the funeral director awaits the directives of the family on how to treat the body, embalment or cremation being the two main options. The funeral director shortly afterward contacts the parish priest to let him know and to start the process of getting a day and time for the funeral. (See below for the specific services a funeral director can offer.) Also before the funeral rites, it is ideal if you can meet with the priest to plan out the funeral mass and to give the priest background information on the person who died. Of course, if you pre-plan your funeral, many of these steps have been done already, which, it seems to me, is a great advantage in this time of stress.

What can friends and family do in the funeral liturgy?

Most typically, friends and family take the roles of reading the first and second readings and presenting the gifts to the altar. We are very flexible as to who can read, but I highly encourage you to choose as a reader a person of exemplary faith and not simply a relative who has a good speaking voice. Regarding the presentation of the gifts to the altar, 2-4 people is the best number, but we can accommodate more if, for example, you want to include all the children or great-grandchildren or some group that adds up to more than four. More than eight begins to look a little awkward, however.

Another beautiful role for family members is to place the funeral pall on the casket at the beginning of the liturgy. This can be a very tender moment, like dressing someone with care. Indeed, in this action you are getting the person dressed for heaven, in a garment symbolic of their baptismal garment.



In addition, you may want to have Eucharistic ministers for communion and these could be drawn from your friends and family or from the parish. In conjunction with this, you should decide if you would like to offer the cup during communion. In choosing friends or family for this role, please choose only those who are Eucharistic ministers in their own parishes. Finally, as noted earlier, even though a eulogy is most fitting at the vigil service, you certainly may choose to have a eulogist at the funeral mass. Eulogies at mass are delivered at the microphone other than the ambo/pulpit, which is reserved for proclamation of the Word.

What about cremation?

Before 1963, the Church did not allow cremation at any point. After that time, it was allowed before burial but not before the funeral liturgy, so that the body of the deceased would be in the church for the funeral. In 1997, however, the Catholic Church in the United States permitted the practice of having cremated remains in the church for the funeral liturgy, with only a few adaptations to the ritual and prayers. The teaching of the Church, however, continues to stress a preference for the presence of the body at the funeral. Part of this preference goes way back to antiquity when pagans who wanted to mock Christian belief in the resurrection

of the body would burn the bodies of the dead as if to challenge God, "Resurrect this!" (God can do that and a lot more, by the way.) More current reasons for encouraging the presence of the body at a funeral is that having the body present to the assembled faithful more clearly evokes the mystery of life and death. The actual body of the deceased more powerfully recalls his or her personal story of faith, loving bonds, friendships, and words and acts of kindness. It is through our bodies that we acted, were known, and loved.

If cremation is chosen, the preferred order of events is to have the vigil and the funeral liturgy with the body present, followed by cremation and burial at a later date. That said, because of the change in church rules, you are welcome to have the cremation before the funeral rites, and bring the ashes into church. At St. James we have a beautifully crafted carrier that allows two or four people to process in and out of church with the urn inside. Either the body or the ashes should be present. A mass celebrated without the physical presence of the deceased does not have the same impact as when it is present, and many of the prayers would have to be omitted. Technically, it is not a funeral mass without the body or ashes.

Another issue with cremation is what to do with the ashes. The Church wants you to treat the ashes the same way you would treat a body. It does not allow scattering of the ashes in nature or keeping the ashes in one's home. Why not? As the material remains of a body that awaits the transformation of resurrection on the last day, the ashes are most appropriately interred just as a body would be. It also allows the remains of the deceased to have location where people can come to visit and pray.

Why is it important to bury the person's body or ashes in a cemetery? If the person is with God, why are cemeteries important?



A gravesite is important because as we need a place for pilgrimage and prayer. While knowing that the person's soul is not underground and is accessible to us no matter where we are, coming to a gravesite and knowing that the body or ashes of our

loved one lie below can evoke a strong sense of memory and presence. My family used to drive all over Marathon County on Memorial Day to visit graves, and I remember those days as ones of intimacy both among my family and with our ancestors who had died. I continue to visit my dad's grave about once a year, and find these times important moments of prayer. My sister is buried next to him, and I will be buried next to them and mom. The fact that we bless these burial places means we confer our faith on them and mark them out as holy. A grave has the sacred role of keeping the physical remains of a precious life that awaits the final general resurrection of all God's People. Visiting a grave can both evoke a strong sense of presence of the person and can serve as a sign of faith in the general resurrection on the day when God will make all things new.

Do I have to be buried in a Catholic cemetery? Can non-Catholics be buried in Catholic cemeteries?

No, you do not have to be buried in a Catholic cemetery, and, yes, non-Catholics can be buried in Catholic cemeteries. Here in Eau Claire, we have Calvary

Cemetery on the southeast side of town, and Sacred Heart and St. Patrick Parishes have their own cemetery. Most people from St. James choose either Calvary Cemetery or Lakeview Cemetery, near St. James on Cameron Ave. The advantage some see in choosing a Catholic Cemetery is that it is consistent with a life lived in communion with the Catholic Church. Catholic doctrine (common among Christians) is that on the “last day” there will be a general Resurrection when soul and body are reunited and all will be judged in their bodies as part of the Last Judgment. It is for this reason that traditionally bodies are buried with their feet facing the east or the rising sun, in anticipation of “sitting up” for the general judgment when God will make all things new. This is a difficult thing to imagine in our scientific day and age, but it does speak to the spiritual truth that we are connected in this life and experience salvation together as well. This sort of spiritual view leads many to want to be buried near others who have shared their journey in the Church. It also supports part of the Church’s mission in its management of physical assets. Non-Catholics are welcome to be buried in Catholic cemeteries. Family members and spouses are not always the same religion, and others may have felt a special connection to the Catholic Church even though they were not baptized Catholic. It is very appropriate to have their burial in a Catholic cemetery.

How do I get space in a cemetery?

Funeral homes can be of assistance, but you can also contact cemeteries directly. To purchase a plot for an in ground burial, the price in Eau Claire in 2014 ranged from \$675 to \$750. Mausoleum space for a whole body interment costs more. You can explore other options with the cemetery administrators.

What about eulogies or speakers at a funeral?

As explained more thoroughly previously, to accommodate the flow of the religious rites, eulogies are best given at the vigil service instead of the funeral mass. Because this is counter to what many people imagine, we do allow a eulogy after communion is shared. Eulogies should be anywhere from one to ten minutes long, as any longer of a talk clearly takes away from the liturgy's focus on Christian faith in the resurrection and the saving power of God.

Will I need casket bearers? What if there is an urn for ashes and not a casket?

Selecting six people to carry the casket is most common. It is also a privilege that people remember for the rest of their lives. I would encourage you to choose six people, keeping in mind their physical strength. Women are certainly capable of filling this role even though they are rarely seen in it. Still, if you are unable to think of people for this role, it is fine to have the funeral director guide the casket up on its stand with wheels. In case of a cremation, 2-4 people are needed to carry the ossuary, with the urn inside, in procession.

How is music selected? May I have relatives or friends perform a song?



We have the happy circumstance of having great funeral cantors here at St. James. Most typically, you would let the funeral director or the priest know which songs, if any, you would like sung at the funeral, and we will relay that to the choir director. If you have no preference or have only one song that you want to make sure is included, the choir director will choose some beautiful songs to

fill in the rest of the service. People can choose an opening song, a song for the preparation of the altar, a communion song and a recessional song. You might have someone with musical gifts among your friends and family and we will happily accommodate any request you have for them to perform a sacred song. Songs that are more secular than sacred should not be part of the funeral mass, but could fit very nicely at the vigil service, which, again, is more focused on remembering the person's life.

What about having a lunch after the funeral mass?

A funeral luncheon is optional. Nonetheless, I recommend having one because it can play a healing role for everyone as family and friends gather in a less formal but still sacred environment to share the love and food that we need to live. After the family has made the initial funeral arrangements with the funeral director, the director then informs the family of the available options for a luncheon and anything extra that the family would like. Our Parish Council of Catholic Women provides all the salads and cakes needed for the number of people expected. Any other food is paid for by the family (except in cases of poverty when the PCCW is happy to provide this service), but the parish lunch coordinators will get the food ready to serve. A typical lunch for one hundred people that includes ham sandwiches, au gratin potatoes and baked beans costs about \$350. In some cases where families know that there will be very few people at the funeral mass, it is a good practice to simply gather for a meal at a home or restaurant after the committal service. Lastly, the timing of the luncheon is important. The committal service at the cemetery can be delayed for several



hours or even days, but it is best to move directly from the funeral mass to the cemetery and then back to church for the luncheon. This has the dual advantage of keeping the funeral rites more or less continuous for the sake of our mental focus, but also allows people to linger at the luncheon for as long or short a time as they like, versus waiting until everyone is ready for the ride to the cemetery.

What does a funeral home provide for me?

At a time of great stress and grief, a good funeral director provides a valuable service. While the priest or other parish minister will help the family work out the details of the funeral and prayer services, the funeral director typically helps to arrange the times of funeral services and to assist the family in filing the necessary documents that need to be filed with the state and social security. The director also helps you choose among the various choices of services available to you, whether it is embalming with a funeral and an earth burial, embalming with a funeral service and cremation after, or cremation from the start. They will also assist with the choice of a casket, burial receptacle (i.e. grave liner or vaults), or an urn. He or she will coordinate with people in the parish who will arrange the music for the funeral and any meal reception after the service. In addition, the funeral director can assist the family with writing an obituary and sending it to the appropriate newspapers, ordering memorial prayer cards, flowers, and procuring a burial plot in a cemetery. Funeral directors will assist in applying for any social security or veteran benefits that may be available, and have a good knowledge of other financial management issues that arise after a death. He or she will initiate the process of getting death certificates issued to you and can point

you in the right direction toward settling the estate of the person who died.

It is no secret that funerals can be very expensive. When cost is a concern, I encourage you to be very up front about this with the funeral director, who will be happy to share the variety of options at different levels of cost and will work with you to select a service to fit your needs. There is absolutely no cause to be embarrassed about this.



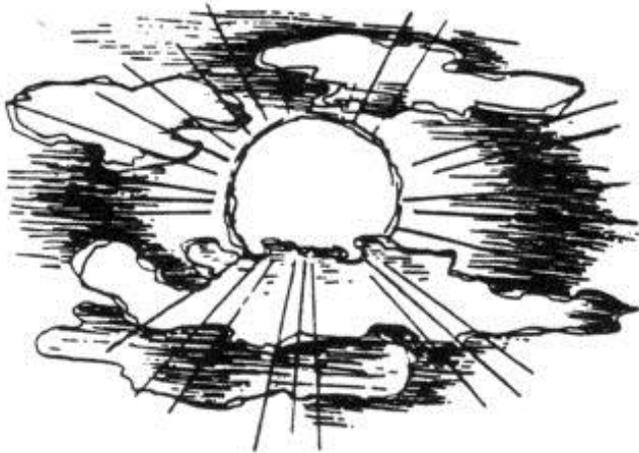
Final Thoughts

I am not sure we as a parish do anything more important than burying our dead. Yes, we have children to educate, the hungry to feed, the Word to preach, and the bread of life to take and eat. Yet we do all of these vital activities mainly to prepare ourselves for that final transition into eternal life. For this Jesus became one of us and suffered, died and rose for us: that we might have eternal life. We can experience a bit of that even now when we love each other with God's own love, but as it says in our third Eucharistic Prayer at funerals, it is only after our death that "we shall see you, our God, as you are. We shall become like you and praise you forever...." It is only after our death that the meaning of our lives is fulfilled, just as the seed dies in order to bear fruit.

In the most common prayer before the Eucharistic Prayer at funeral masses we hear, "Lord, for your faithful people life is changed, not ended. When the body of our earthly dwelling lies in death we gain an

everlasting dwelling place in heaven.” That is our faith. It is the faith of the church and I pray that you are gifted with this faith. If not, we will carry you with all the faith we can muster in the God who will not abandon us in death but who seeks to raise us up just as his raised his Son.

I hope you have found this booklet helpful. On the last page, please see a form that you could use to prepare the details of your funeral. You could fill that out, keep a copy for yourself and we can keep one on file at the parish. Peace, Fr. Tom



Questions for the priest.

**Questions for the funeral
director.**

PLANNING FOR A FUNERAL

Name

Name Funeral Home

Vigil Service Date _____ Time _____

Visitation Hours _____

Eulogy Yes _____ If yes, at vigil _____

at funeral mass _____

No _____

Funeral Liturgy

Date _____ Time _____

Name of Church

Reader(s)

Reading Selections

Old Testament _____

New Testament _____

Gospel _____

Servers (optional)

Eucharistic Ministers

Music Selections

You may or may not have preferences. It is ok to select one or more.

Procession into church _____

Song for Altar Preparation _____

Communion _____

Recession out of church _____

Committal

Name of Cemetery

_____ Casket _____ Cremains

Casket/Urn Bearer(s)

Lunch _____ Yes _____ No