



# Funeral Mass

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## **The Purpose of a Funeral Mass**

In the Catholic Church, a Funeral Mass serves several purposes. The Church offers prayers for the soul of the one who has died, asking God to “open the gates of paradise” to them, and to grant them forgiveness for any sins they may have committed. In offering these prayers as part of the Mass, we make them part of the offering Jesus made to God His Father on the cross, as we come together into His presence.

The Funeral Mass, while primarily offered for the benefit of the deceased, is also for the benefit of the bereaved. The Scriptural Readings and the priest’s homily are to strengthen the faith of the mourners, helping them to believe in God’s promises; by this they can find comfort in a difficult time.

While praying for the deceased and comforting the bereaved, the Funeral Mass also offers people the opportunity to say farewell to a loved one—a difficult thing, since no one ever welcomes this farewell. For this reason, as well as the family and close friends, other friends and acquaintances, as well as members of the Parish, will attend a Funeral Mass to show their respect, offer their condolences and join in the prayers.

A Funeral Mass is focused on two things: the one who has died and the “Paschal Mystery” of Jesus Christ—His death and resurrection. We will remember the deceased as a member of our Church family, who received eternal life when they were baptized, as well as remembering them as part of their own family and circle of friends.

## **Key Elements in the Funeral Mass**

1. Greeting of Body
2. Entrance Hymn
3. Greeting
4. Opening Prayer
5. First Reading
6. Psalm (Usually Sung)
7. Second Reading
8. Alleluia
9. Gospel
10. Homily
11. Intercessions
12. Eucharistic Prayer
13. Our Father
14. Communion and Hymn
15. Rite of Commendations
16. Closing Hymn

### *Welcome of the Deceased*

At the beginning of the Funeral Mass, we welcome the body of the one who has died into the Church. The priest will greet the coffin and the mourners at the door of the Church and bless it with holy water. This harks back to the very first time the deceased entered Church—on the day of their baptism. On arriving in Church, the coffin may be draped with the Funeral Pall, a white cloth which is placed on the coffin in memory of the white garments worn at baptism. The Easter Candle is placed near the coffin, as a sign of the light of Christ shining on our beloved brother or sister who has died.

### *Readings from Scripture*

In every Catholic Liturgy one of the most important features is listening to readings from the Bible—what we call the Liturgy of the Word (of God). Rather than just using our own words at the difficult time of bereavement, we turn to the Word of God to see what hope God offers us. There will be a choice of readings from the Old and New Testament and a Gospel reading. After the readings the priest will preach the homily, which will try to open the biblical readings and apply them to the person we are praying for.

### *Celebration of the Eucharist and Holy Communion*

After the Liturgy of the Word, we move to the altar, to remember the Last Supper of Jesus. We offer gifts of bread and wine, which the priest will pray over, just as Jesus did with his disciples. The Catholic Church believes that Jesus really gave His Body and Blood to His disciples, and He does the same today. When the priest uses His words “This is my Body, this is my Blood”, the bread changes into the Body of Christ and the wine changes into His precious Blood. We always treat these with the utmost reverence, and ask that others, even if not of our faith, show similar respect. This is the real presence of Jesus, Son of God, who comes to be with us in this moment of grief and mourning. His gift of His Body and Blood are shared in Holy Communion: we believe that sharing in communion is a sign of our unity.

### *Commendation and Farewell*

After Communion, the Church says farewell to the deceased, using the symbols of Holy Water and Incense: Holy Water remembers baptism once more; incense is burned in Church for those things which are most special and sacred, and incensing the coffin honours the body of the one who has died. The priest will then offer the Prayer of Commendation, which asks to God to welcome our departed brother or sister into Eternal Life. After this we will make our way out of Church.

### **Hymns and other Music**

Sacred music is important in our celebrations in the Catholic Church, since it adds solemnity and a sense of celebration to our rites. It is custom to have some singing at a Funeral Mass, and the bereaved will be consulted about the choice of hymns for the Funeral. It should be noted, however, that we only use “religious” texts and hymns in Church—secular music does not have a place in the Mass and should be used at some other occasion.