

## Mass for Children Who Died Before Baptism Resource for Parishes ~ Diocese of Bismarck

*Our faith tells us that every human person is created in the image of God. From the very moment of conception God wills us into being and desires that we should spend eternal life with him. Our soul does not perish when it separates from the body at death, but will be reunited with the body at the final Resurrection (cf. Catechism of the Catholic Church, 366). The Church teaches us that with “regards to children who have died without Baptism, the Church can only entrust them to the mercy of God, as she does in her funeral rites for them. Indeed, the great mercy of God who desires that all men should be saved, and Jesus’ tenderness towards children which caused him to say: ‘Let the children come to me, do not hinder them’ (Mark 10:14), allow us to hope that there is a way of salvation for children who have died without Baptism” (Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1261). We, the living faithful, can acknowledge this hope by actively participating in a liturgy which gives dignity and recognition to a deceased child. The intention of this Mass is to help the healing process for parents who have lost children before Baptism, through miscarriage, still birth, or abortion.*

### Mass Information

The *Roman Missal* states: Should a child whom the parents wished to be baptized, die before Baptism, the Diocesan Bishop, taking into consideration pastoral circumstances, may permit the funeral to be celebrated in the home of the deceased child ... In funerals of this kind there should ordinarily be a Liturgy of the Word, as described in the Roman Ritual [see the *Order of Christian Funerals*, Part II: Funeral Rites for Children]. Nevertheless, if at times the celebration of Mass is judged opportune, [the texts given in the *Roman Missal*] should be used. (See *Roman Missal*, Masses for the Dead, I. Funeral Mass, F. For the Funeral of a Child Who Died Before Baptism. If the celebration involves more than one child or family, proper adaptations to the wording of the prayers (i.e. from singular to plural) would be appropriate.)

### Readings

Scripture readings to be used for the liturgy are found in the *Order of Christian Funerals*, Part III: Texts of Sacred Scripture, 17. Funerals for Children Who Died before Baptism. (They are also found in the *Lectionary for Mass*, volume IV, Masses for the Dead, Funerals for Children who Died Before Baptism, no. 1023 - 1026).

### Song Suggestions

There are many other possibilities, these are some others have used.

- The King of Love
- I Heard the Voice of Jesus Say
- I Am the Bread of Life
- Hail Mary, Gentle Woman
- Lord of All Hopefulness
- You Are Near
- God, You Search Me
- Shelter Me, O God
- You Are Mine
- The Supper of the Lord
- God Beyond All Praising
- There’s A Wideness in God’s Mercy

### Blessings

It is appropriate (though optional) to invite families forward during or at the end of the celebration to offer a blessing over them. This can also be a time for them to either receive a rose (or other flower); one for each child lost, and/or take a rose to place at a side altar in remembrance. It is important that an adequate number of flowers are available to ensure everyone there who has lost a child has an opportunity to receive them. The Prayers of Blessing from the *Book of Blessings*, Blessings of Parents after a Miscarriage, could be adapted and utilized for this occasion.

Intercessions: Below are some sample Prayers of the Faithful that could be used.

- For the children of those families present with us today who have died within their mother’s womb or shortly after birth, that they be held securely in God’s loving embrace now and for all eternity.

- For those parents present who grieve over the death of their child that they be comforted in the knowledge that their child dwells with God.
- For all brothers, sisters and grandparents who grieve the loss of a child in death, that they feel the healing power of Christ in the midst of their pain and grief.
- For children who have died of disease, that these little ones be seated close to the Lord at his heavenly table.
- For all children carried in their mother's womb, that their growth and development may be under the watchful care of God's blessings.
- For all those who care for pregnant mothers and assist in the delivery of new life, that they may do so with wisdom and compassion.
- For the whole Church, that we prepare worthily for the hour of our death, when God will call us by name to pass from this world to the next.
- For all who have lost children (before Baptism), that they come to know the healing love of God
- For the families here today mourning the loss of a child, that they are able to offer up their suffering for the good of their souls and the souls of their loved ones.
- For all gathered here today, that they grow in their understanding of the plan of God's salvation for them and their families.

#### Book or Notecards for Writing Names

It is nice to have a book or notecards that families can write the name of the baby in when they come into the Church. Writing the name (even "Baby \_\_\_\_\_") makes it tangible that this was a life that is being remembered.

- This book of names or a basket of name cards can be brought up during the offertory to be remembered at the Mass.
- You can do notecards with envelopes for the family to put their name on the outside – this way they could be returned as a memento after Mass.
- I have some sample notecards with Scriptures, verses, etc. that can be emailed to you for your use.

#### Sample Bulletin Announcement

Below is a sample bulletin announcement. Just replace the underlined words with the appropriate information.

*A Memorial Mass for Children Who Died Before Baptism will be celebrated at TIME on DATE at PLACE. This Mass will be an opportunity for healing for the families and a chance for our parish family to remember and celebrate these children lost through miscarriage, still birth, or abortion. All are welcome including parents, grandparents, siblings, and those who care. The Mass will be followed by LUNCH, RECEPTION, ETC. in PLACE. Reservations are requested but not required. Call PHONE #."*

#### Other Notes

After compiling information from various people and parishes who conduct this type of Mass or something similar, I wanted to share a few suggestions with you.

- It is nice to hold a reception afterwards (lunch, or even simpler). This emphasizes the importance, as many have never had a chance for a funeral or to grieve their loss in this way. It is also a great opportunity for these families to fellowship.
- Consider publicizing the Mass outside your parish and even beyond your community. There are probably many women, men and families who could use this Mass for healing. If you can get the paper to run a story in advance or put it in public announcements, this will increase awareness and attendance.
- There are several times throughout the Liturgical Year when such a Mass could be offered. Almost anytime could be appropriate, a few suggestions would be: October – Respect Life Month, November – Remembrance of the deceased, December – Holy Innocents, May/June – Mother's /Father's Day).
- I have several resources that I have compiled that were too lengthy to include here. (Examples: sample notecards for names, bulletin inserts, programs, naming ceremonies, etc.) I would be more than happy to email them to you or work with you to find what you need to offer this in your parish.

**Feel free to contact me for additional resources, with questions, etc.**

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