

The Funeral Liturgy

The Catholic Funeral Mass **emphasizes our faith in Jesus' victory over death and our hope in the Resurrection.** It is not so much a celebration of the life of the deceased, but a prayer that the life and death of the deceased may be joined to Christ in heaven. We believe that death is not the end, but the beginning of a perfect permanent life with Christ. Through the many ceremonies and symbols that are part of our faith, we find hope in the midst of our tears.

In order to help make the funeral liturgy more consoling and understandable, we have provided some explanations of these parts of the liturgy. The priest wears the colors white and purple. The color **white is associated with the glory of God**, especially noted in the Transfiguration account in scripture. The color **purple is a sign of the kingdom and reign of God.** The risen Lord is often presented in purple robes as a symbol that His reign has begun.

The Funeral Mass consists of four main parts:

I. Introductory rites:

• Greeting and sprinkling with holy water and placing the pall:

The introductory rites express the meaning of baptism. Through baptism the person became a member of the Body of Christ, and entered the Church. The casket (or urn) is sprinkled with waters of baptism. It is covered with a white cloth called a pall, a symbol of being clothed with Christ in baptism, and a crucifix may be placed in the casket expressing baptism's meaning. Through baptism, the faithful share in the death of the Lord in hope of sharing in His resurrection. Our journey of faith begins at baptism and reaches its fulfillment when the gates of paradise are opened to receive the faithful at death.

- **Entrance procession:**

The body of the deceased is brought before the altar to express that **we are offering them to God** in hope of the life promised to all who are united with Christ. The altar is where we celebrate the memorial of the passion, death, and resurrection of Christ; we call this the Paschal Mystery.

Near the casket is a large candle call the Paschal Candle. It is a symbol of the light of Christ which darkness cannot extinguish. The candle is part of the Easter celebration and is part of the celebration of baptism.

- **Song and Opening prayer**

II. **Liturgy of the Word:**

- **Scripture readings and responsorial Psalm:**

Readings are selected that best capture the religious life experience of the loved one. The readings may include a selection from the Old Testament, a responsorial Psalm, a selection from the New Testament and a Gospel.

- **Homily:**

The homily focuses on the Paschal Mystery and God's love.

- **General intercessions:**

Prayers for the deceased and bereaved.

III. Liturgy of the Eucharist:

• Preparation of the Altar and the Gifts:

As the priest prepares the altar for the celebration of the Paschal Mystery, gifts of bread and wine are brought forward by family members. Bringing the bread and wine to the altar expresses bringing our lives to be united with His sacrifice.

• Eucharistic prayer:

In word and sacrament we celebrate the memorial of Christ's resurrection and reaffirm our share in this mystery.

• Communion Rite:

“Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has life eternal, and I will raise him up on the last day.” - John 6:54

Because Catholics believe that the celebration of the Eucharist is a sign of the reality of the oneness of faith, life and worship, non-Christians and members of those churches with whom we are not yet fully united are ordinarily not admitted to Holy Communion.

IV. Final Commendation:

• Song of Farewell and Incense:

Incense is most often a resin from a tree. It is a symbol of life, similar to the meaning of blood. Because incense does not deteriorate, it is a symbol of eternal life. When it is burned, the smoke rising expresses both the offering of the prayers of the community gathered and the offering of the deceased to God. The sweet odor is a metaphor for the joy, beauty and happiness of heaven.

• Prayer of Commendation:

The deceased is entrusted to God's tender care.

