

Announcement of Death

When preparing an announcement of death for various forms of media, Catholics are encouraged to refrain from terms such as “Mass of Resurrection” or “Memorial Mass” when announcing the Funeral Mass. The term “Mass of Christian Burial” better reflects the Catholic Mass.

Care of the Body

When your deceased loved one was baptized, the body was marked with the seal of the Trinity and became the temple of the Holy Spirit. Our faith teaches that we all possess a natural and a spiritual body. Like a seed that must be planted in order to rise up, the natural body is put down into the earth to rise (1 Cor. 15: 37).

Christians respect and honor the bodies of the dead and the places where they rest. It is the ancient Christian custom to bury or entomb the bodies of the dead. Family is encouraged to assist with the preparation and laying out of the body. The Church recognizes this as the preferred way to care for the body.

Cremation as a Choice

If circumstances are such that cremation is the only option, it is preferable that it be delayed until after the celebration of the Funeral. Check with your Funeral Professional about the possibility of renting a casket for this purpose. Cremated remains (cremains) are to be buried or entombed. If buried, cremains are placed in an urn that is an appropriate and worthy container and then placed into the burial site. When entombed, the urn is placed in a columbarium, an arrangement of niches in a mausoleum, a room or wall for permanent memorial. The practice of scattering cremated remains on the water, land, from the air, or keeping cremated remains in the home of a relative or friend of the deceased is not in keeping with the respect due to the deceased.

The Funeral Rites

The Catholic Church has many prayer moments surrounding the death of a loved one. At the Funeral and at other times of prayer, we celebrate the life, death and resurrection of Christ and how through baptism, the deceased shares in the life of Christ. There is a communal dimension to this prayer. The Funeral is offered by the Church community as a memorial of Christ’s death and resurrection. Emphasis on the deceased should not overshadow the paschal mystery of the Lord’s death and resurrection.

Our faith tells us that at death, life is changed not ended. While hope may seem far off now, your Pastoral Leader and parish community are ready to assist you in various ways. Through the prayers and support of your parish, may you be consoled in your grief.

If you or your deceased loved one has grown apart from the life of the Church, we welcome you back and hope that you can find peace during this time.

The assistance of Funeral Home Directors and other professionals is extremely valuable when planning a funeral. The family should request to meet with the Pastoral Leader either before, in conjunction with, or after meeting with the Funeral Director. This assures that all parties involved are communicating effectively.

Special Considerations

Catholics believe that the Eucharist is a sign of the reality of unity and is the true presence of the Body and Blood of Christ. While we share in a common baptism, members of Christian churches with whom the Catholic Church is not fully united are ordinarily not admitted to Holy Communion. If the deceased has many family members from other faith traditions, it may be best to have a separate service instead of a Funeral Mass or Funeral Liturgy at the parish. This would be especially true if a large crowd with mixed faith traditions is expected. We hope and pray that some day these sad divisions will disappear and that the Holy Spirit will guide us to unity.

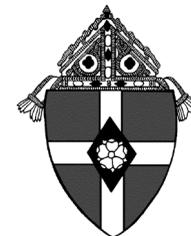
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How to Plan for a Catholic Funeral

Diocese of Winona

The Funeral Rites

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Common Prayer Moments:

Prayers After Death

Immediately after death, usually during the first meeting with the Pastoral Leader and family.

Gathering in the Presence of the Body

For immediate family, in the presence of the body, before or after preparation for burial.

Vigil for the Deceased

For family, friends and parish community, prayed during the hours of visitation.

Mass of Christian Burial or Funeral Liturgy Outside Mass

For family, friends and parish community, the Paschal mystery is proclaimed and celebrated. The Mass always includes Holy Communion.

Rite of Committal

Done at the burial site.

Scripture Readings

There are many scripture readings for a Catholic Funeral that the family can choose from. Readings that are carefully chosen and proclaimed well give the community an opportunity to hear God speak to them in their grief. If possible, it is best to choose a reader whom is a lector at his or her parish. Nonbiblical readings may not be used at the Funeral. These would be better placed at some other time, such as during the visitation or at a family gathering apart from the Funeral.

Music

Music serves to express what words alone can not. Music that is sung by all those gathered for the occasion unites the faithful in the shared experience of prayer. Sacred music that is chosen also conveys the Christian meaning of sharing in the paschal mystery of Christ.

Pre-recorded music and secular music is not appropriate for a Catholic Funeral. There are certain parts of the Catholic Mass that are always sung. These include the Holy Holy, Memorial Acclamation, and Amen. The singing of the Lord's Prayer by a soloist or ensemble is not fitting, for it prevents the gathered assembly from expressing their faith. Instead, the Lord's Prayer is better recited or sung with a traditional chant. Your pastoral leader or parish musicians can direct you to music that is familiar to the parish and is directed toward the Christian understanding of death and life everlasting.

Remarks of Remembrance

It has become increasingly popular to remem-

ber the deceased at the Funeral Mass by asking a member of the family or a close friend to share some thoughts about the deceased. While this can be a very fitting way to honor the deceased, it is actually preferred to have these remarks shared during the Vigil. Through the presence of Christ found in the Eucharist, Scripture, the gathered faithful and the priest, the Funeral Mass moves us from intense grief and loss, to hopeful joy and peace. Having a sad or unrehearsed eulogy after Communion can tend to negate the prayer before it. It is for this reason that the preferred place of the Eulogy, if done at all, be at the Vigil or before the Liturgy of the Word of the Funeral Mass.

Steps for Preparing Remarks of Remembrance

What sets this person apart or what can you share about the person's spirit, particularly in living out the faith or bringing Christ's presence into the world?

Be specific and brief. About 3-5 minutes is the norm. The eulogy should always be written out for better delivery. A poorly prepared, long-winded or incoherent eulogy can be embarrassing and is detrimental to the atmosphere of prayer and the proper spirit of the occasion.

The eulogy should be done with decorum, decency and with respect to the Catholic faith and tradition. Referring to things such as poems or song texts that are in opposition to the Catholic belief of Death and Resurrection are not appropriate.

It is most appropriate that the eulogy or other stories be shared during the time of the Vigil.

Do not feel that it is necessary to offer a eulogy at the Funeral. In fact, it is an option.

Writing can be especially helpful during the grieving process. In place of a eulogy, the family is encouraged to write down loving memories of the deceased. These memories could be given to the priest or deacon a day or two before the funeral so that he can include those memories in the homily.

Christian Symbols

The Paschal Candle, or Easter Candle, will be placed near the coffin during the Funeral Mass or Liturgy. This candle reminds the faithful of Christ's undying presence among them, of his victory over sin and death, and of their share in that victory by virtue of their baptism.

Holy Water is used during the funeral rites to remind us of the saving waters of baptism. Holy Water is normally sprinkled on the casket when the body is received into the Church and again before the body is buried. It can also be used at the time when the family gathers around the presence of the body.

Incense is a sign of the community's prayers for the deceased rising up to God. Incense may be used after the priest reverences the altar during the opening hymn. It is customary to also incense the casket during the Song of Farewell, before the procession to the cemetery.

A Pall is used to cover the casket when it is brought into the Church. It is a large white covering that reminds us of the white garment used at baptism and as a sign of the Christian dignity of the person and of being "clothed in Christ". As this symbol recognizes that "all are equal in the eyes of God" (James 2:1-9), you will find that even the most decorated deceased veteran will have the flag replaced with the simple symbol of the white pall.