

Planning The Catholic Funeral

Church of the Ascension



*“Do not let your hearts be
troubled.*

*You have faith in God;
Have faith also in me.”*

John 14:1

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Introduction:

We know that someday we will die. The body that has been the physical expression of who we are and how we love will cease to function. Nonetheless, the death we expect is rarely the death we experience. Whether it comes swiftly after a long life or slowly while someone is still young, death is always startling. While anticipated, death still surprises us.

As Catholics we believe that through our baptism we experience a kind of death, to ourselves and to the world. We were claimed for Christ, we belong to him. Having 'died' with Christ in baptism, we believe we shall rise with him on the last day. Our physical death, therefore, is really a preparation for eternity. It is this life of baptismal promise and commitment, which we celebrate in the Catholic Funeral Liturgy. In this liturgy we remember not only the life of one who has died but also the presence of the Lord Jesus in that person's life.

The Catholic Funeral Liturgy has several ritual moments, through which we do two things. First, we commend the dead person to the Lord. Second, we console and support those closest to him or her, aid and strengthen the whole community in our faith that on the last day the Lord will recognize all whom he calls his own. We commit ourselves to going on, living in faith, hoping in the promises of the Lord until that day we all meet around the heavenly banquet table

These ritual moments — from the wake, which testifies to the dignity of each human being through the sprinkling of holy water, which recalls his or her baptismal promise, until the final commendation and burial, which sets aside time and space for the physical remains of this child of God — all work together to proclaim our faith that Christ who died for us and has risen from the dead will not forget his own.

You are encouraged to help plan your Funeral Liturgy well in advance in order that your loved ones may celebrate your life and mourn your loss. Indeed, you may even wish to consult your family in this planning process. This planning guide is provided to enable you to do so.

Planning:

This guide has been prepared to help you in planning your funeral. It is important to realize that in most cases you will be listing preferences. Even though the parish staff wishes to be sensitive to your feelings, sometimes for various reasons not all your preferences can be honored. Please keep in mind when noting your liturgical preferences that the funeral rites take place as part of the Church's overall liturgical life. Therefore, for example, the music you choose should be from hymns and songs you regularly hear during the Sunday liturgy.

The Wake And Vigil:

Historically, the wake receives its name from the intention of the family and community to 'stay awake'. A person who loved and was loved by the Lord, who had incalculable worth and dignity as a human being has died. We set aside time to pray and reflect, to gather and support one another. We stop what we would ordinarily be doing to mark this passage. This 'waking' or 'staying awake' is a holy time. It is marked by recollecting not only the life of the deceased, but also the work of the Lord in our loved one's life.

Local custom considers the 'funeral home' as the place for most of the wake or what is often called 'visitation'.

The Catholic Vigil Service, which normally concludes the wake, is normally held in the church. This is the place where the baptismal commitment was made and where the person 'tasted the goodness of the Lord in the Eucharist. It can also be the most appropriate place for the final expression of hope and farewell.

The Vigil Service Can take one of two forms. It can consist of Evening Prayer from the *Liturgy of the Hours for the Dead* or it can be similar to a *Liturgy of the Word*. In both cases it consists of a series of psalms, readings and intercessory prayers appropriate for all Christians who gather. In this service we may experience the power of Scripture as never before, as it speaks to our need for consolation and strength. Scripture unites us with mourners across a wide variety of Christian traditions.

It is also customary, although not mandatory, to add a portion of the Rosary to the Vigil Prayers. Also, music is an important part of our prayer life and therefore we endeavor to have as much sung prayer as possible.

In addition to a formal Vigil Service, prayers may be offered at any time during a wake. These may be done privately at the casket, or publicly in a group.

A question, which often arises is: *'May I have the casket open during the Vigil Service or must it remain closed?'* This depends totally upon your wishes. At the Funeral Mass the casket must remain closed, but during the Vigil Service the casket may be open or remain closed. If it remains closed during the prayers then you may wish to have it opened after the prayer service so that mourners may offer a final good-bye. There is no set custom.

All of these prayers at a Wake or at a Catholic Vigil Service may be offered by a priest or by any layperson.

Liturgical Information:

In planning the liturgy portion of your funeral it is important to do so in consultation with a priest. It is possible to choose one reading as indicated below. The reading is either from the Old Testament or the New Testament, excluding the Gospels. It is the custom that one of the parish lectors proclaims any readings apart from the Gospel, however you may ask a relative or friend to proclaim the readings.

It is also possible to select certain hymns/songs to be sung by the choir. The choir can sing the Responsorial Psalm or a hymn in place of the psalm.

Vigil Service Themes and Scripture Readings for the Funeral and Memorial Mass:

There are a few binders in the office, which have the vigil themes and scripture passages for the services. Please pick one up from the office to choose the readings and return it afterwards for others to use.

Music Selections:

A number of selections are possible from the lists provided for the Catholic Book of Worship III and the Glory and Praise hymnals at the back of the binders. On the lists there is a selection of sheet music not in the hymnals.

The parts of the Mass (Holy, Holy, Memorial Acclamation and Great Amen as well as the Lamb of God) are usually selected in accord with the choir's ability.

It is the tradition of the parish to have a choir sing at each Funeral Liturgy. The number of singers and musicians depends upon the season of the year and the time of day. Funeral Liturgies are celebrated according to good liturgical practice, which demands assembly participation. For this reason rather than a soloist/organist alone at the liturgy, which often does not encourage assembly participation, the parish custom is to have a choir lead us in sung prayer.

The Funeral Liturgy:

The Mass of Christian Burial follows very closely the structure of Sunday Eucharist. The Introductory Rites recall the baptismal promise.

The placing of a pall on the coffin, a decorated white cloth reminiscent of the white robe given each of the newly baptized, symbolizes his or her new life in Christ...or when there is a Vigil Service, the Introductory Rites would be done on the prior evening.

The Liturgy of the Word includes two or three readings (your choice), from both the Old and New Testaments. Between the readings there is a Responsorial psalm and prior to the proclamation of the Gospel there is a gospel acclamation. The homily draws a message of hope and confidence in the Lord. The homily is not a eulogy, but rather a reflection on the power and presence of the Lord in the Scriptures, in the Church, and in the life of the deceased. We pray for the family and friends of the person who has died, but also for the needs of the wider community. We are reminded here that we are not isolated in our grief, but bound to all of humanity.

The Church discourages a eulogy at the Funeral Mass and prefers that a Eulogy be given at the Vigil Service. However, common custom often still sees the eulogy given at the Funeral Mass.

A Eulogy ought to be authentic and address both the positive and less positive aspects of the person's life. In the context of a Catholic Funeral Liturgy, it ought to bring to mind the person's faith in God and in the Church.

The Liturgy of the Eucharist then proceeds as it would on any Sunday. A song may be sung as the gifts are presented and the altar is prepared. The celebrant proclaims the Eucharistic prayer (the great central prayer of praise for our liberation through Jesus) while the worshipping assembly responds in acclamation at the appropriate times. We pray the 'Our Father', exchange the sign of peace, and then recite or sing the 'Lamb of God'. There may be a communion song while people in the assembly receive communion.

Final Commendation and Burial:

After communion the priest addresses the assembly and invites them to commend their dead sister or brother to the Lord. This period of prayer is the beginning of the final farewell process, which ends in burial or cremation. A song is sung while the body of the deceased is carried from the church. At the cemetery the faithful take their leave of their dead brother or sister. Before they depart, the mourners pray also for themselves, for strength to sustain them in their present grief, and for serenity at the time of their own death.

Memorial Services:

When possible the physical remains of the dead person are to be present for the funeral. The body is the outward expression of what we believe and how we love it. It is the body as well as the soul that is washed clean in baptism, the body, which is physically united with Jesus in the Eucharist, and the body, which at last is anointed.

If the body is not present for the funeral, a Memorial Mass or service is held. A Memorial Mass is much like a Mass of Christian Burial but without those ritual moments, which directly honour the physical remains of the dead person. A Memorial Service may include readings and prayers, but does not include the Liturgy of the Eucharist.

It is also permissible to have the Ashes present for the Memorial Mass but without those ritual moments, which directly honour the physical remains of the deceased.

Cremation:

While the cremation of Roman Catholics is allowed, it is still preferable in our tradition that the physical remains of the person — the body that was the '*Temple of the Holy Spirit*' — be present for the funeral. After the funeral, the body may be taken for cremation.

Suggested Honorarium / Donations...What should I give?

The following donations are suggested by local funeral homes. It is stressed that it is a *donation*.

Priest: \$100.00 — \$200.00

Organist: \$65.00 — \$75.00

Soloist: \$55.00 — \$65.00

Funeral Luncheon: The Catholic Women's League (C.W.L.) will provide a luncheon with a donation to cover the food.

Lunch: Served before 1:00p.m. includes assorted sandwiches, pickles, sweets (squares and cookies), coffee, tea and juice. The suggested donation is \$2.50 per person.

Afternoon Tea: Served after 1:00p.m. includes raisin bread, sweets (squares and cookies), coffee, tea and juice. The suggested donation is \$2.00 per person.

Note: Cheese, vegetable and fruit trays can be purchased at an extra cost; secondly, relatives and friends may donate baked goods if they wish to.

*This information will be shared with family members
& held in confidence at the Church office.*