IN THE SURE AND CERTAIN HOPE: PREPARING A CATHOLIC FUNERAL

Speaking in remembrance—eulogies at Funeral Masses

Eulogies and personal remembrances have their place at the wake service, but not, as such, in the funeral Mass itself. The Mass is offered for the forgiveness of sins and the salvation of the soul of the departed. The liturgy speaks of the mystery of Christ's death and resurrection, which gives the deepest meaning to the life of the deceased.

Cremation

The Church prefers to bury the body of the deceased in or on consecrated ground. For a variety of reasons, some people may prefer to have the body of the deceased cremated before it is buried. This is allowed, as long as there is no intentional denial of the final resurrection of the body.

The burial or inurnment in a cemetery, mausoleum, or columbarium should occur as soon as possible after the funeral Mass, so that the cremated remains of the body are not kept in the funeral home or family home. Out of respect for the body, the Church does not permit the cremated remains of the body to be scattered over water or some favorite place. Cremated remains are to be given the same respect as the body.
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THE FORGIVENESS OF SINS AND SALVATION OF THE SOUL

“Into your hands, Father of mercies, we commend our brother/sister in the sure and certain hope that, together with all who have died in Christ, he/she will rise with him on the last day.”

(ORDER OF CHRISTIAN FUNERALS)

As Catholics, we believe that what happened to Jesus in His resurrection from the dead will also one day happen to us. This hope in life after death has brought joy and comfort to millions of believers as they mourn the death and experience the loss of a loved one.

The following outlines a traditional Catholic Funeral and provides an explanation of each event’s purpose and significance.

Vigil and Related Rites and Prayers (Wake Service)

The Vigil for the Deceased is the first way that the Church captures the sentiments of those who are grieving and sets them in the context of our faith. A prayer service with readings selected from Scripture to fit the circumstances of the deceased, a homily that comforts and gives hope, intercessions that speak to the faith of those gathered around the deceased, and prayers selected from the rich resources found in the Order of Christian Funerals can do a great deal to prepare people to enter into the Christian spirit of the funeral liturgy. The Rosary or other prayers to the Blessed Virgin Mary can be part of the Vigil.

Eulogies are best given at the Vigil Service or at some appropriate time during the wake. While there is a natural desire to say good things about a person who has died, we must always remember that in the context of prayer, it is the working of God’s grace in the life of the deceased for which we want to give thanks and praise. Eulogies in the context of prayer must be more than mere tributes to the goodness of the deceased. There must be reference to what God has done for the deceased person and for us through him or her. Priests and parish bereavement ministers are available to assist families in selecting Scripture readings and music for funeral liturgies.
**The Forgiveness of Sins and Salvation of the Soul**

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**Funeral Liturgy (usually Mass)**

Celebrating the funeral liturgy at Mass in the parish church is the normal way in which most Catholics experience the Order of Christian Funerals. The Eucharist looks forward to our participation in the heavenly banquet, where we are united with Jesus, the saints, and all those who share eternal life. Jesus said, “whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood shall live forever.” (John 6:54) The Eucharist is truly the central point in a Catholic funeral. Its effectiveness is greatly enhanced when the family participates in appropriate ways: clothing the casket with the pall, selecting the Scripture readings, serving as lectors or extraordinary ministers of holy communion, singing the responses and the hymns and, most especially, receiving the Eucharist.

The funeral homily is of utmost importance in the funeral liturgy. A homily may be delivered only by a priest or a deacon, as liturgical homilies are part of the sacramental rite of the Eucharist. The homily speaks of the mystery of Christ’s death and resurrection and gives the deeper meaning that is found in the experience of death and dying. The homily occurs within the context of a funeral Mass that is offered for the forgiveness of sins and the salvation of the soul of the faithful departed.

**Committal Service (at Cemetery)**

The Rite of Committal is the final liturgy in the Order of Christian Funerals. Like the Vigil Service, the Rite of Committal makes use of Scripture, a few words of hope by the presider, intercessions, and prayers.

A Catholic cemetery is a place of honor and respect for those who have died. It is a memorial to all who are interred there. It is a sacred place where Catholics come to express their grief and hope for their loved one who has preceded them in death. It is consecrated ground, fitting for someone whose body was a temple of the Holy Spirit on earth and now awaits the resurrection from the dead.

To have a representative of the Church present at this final moment is a great source of consolation to those who will now continue their journeys in life without their beloved. While a priest may be unavailable to preside at the Committal Service, a deacon or a trained bereavement minister may represent the Church at this final moment.

**The Role of Music in the Funeral Rites**

The Order of Christian Funerals notes that the role and place of music is “integral to the funeral rites.” Hymns and songs that help to express our Christian hope, provide consolation for those who mourn, and help to point us to the Paschal Mystery of Christ’s saving death and resurrection should, as much as possible, be part of each of the three major ritual moments: the wake, the funeral Mass, and the committal service. Music or songs that are not liturgical or are otherwise inappropriate for the funeral Mass can be included at various times outside the funeral rites, for example, during the wake or after the committal service at the cemetery.
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The Grotto of Our Lady of Lourdes.

Cedar Grove Cemetery
Notre Dame, IN 46556
574.631.5660
cemetery.nd.edu

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