

CATHOLIC FUNERALS

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

As you begin to prepare your own funeral or plan for the funeral of a loved one, the information found in this pamphlet will be helpful to you. Just as your Catholic faith has guided you through life, it will support and guide you in preparing to embrace death.

1 Where is the basic understanding and theology of Catholic funerals to be found?

The Order of Christian Funerals, published in 1989, contains a clear theology of the attitude of the Catholic Church toward life after death and thus the respect the Church has for the human person, body and soul. An appendix to this ritual on cremation was published in 1997. The use of both is mandated in the United States.

2 How is respect to be shown to the deceased?

The body of the deceased is to be buried (interment) or entombed in a mausoleum (entombment). These practices demonstrate Christian faith in awaiting the resurrection. (Cremation is covered later, in a separate section.)

3 May Catholics who have been divorced and remarried outside the Church or who have committed suicide be buried with a Catholic ceremony?

Such circumstances of themselves do not exclude the possibility of a Catholic burial. Families should consult the priest or Deacon prior to making any arrangements to determine what rites may be most appropriate in the situation.

OVERVIEW OF CHRISTIAN FUNERAL RITES

4 How many parts make up the funeral rites?

There are three main parts:

- 1) The Vigil
- 2) The Funeral Liturgy (with or without the Requiem or Funeral Mass)
- 3) The Rite of Committal.

Besides these, other optional rites are provided:

- 1) Prayers just after death
- 2) Prayers for gathering in the presence
- 3) Prayers for transferring the body to the church.

5 Must funeral rites be led by a priest?

The ritual of the Catholic Church allows for priests or deacons, to conduct the various services including the Vigil, a Funeral Liturgy apart from a Funeral Mass, and the Rite of Committal.

6 How best can families prepare for these rites?

Family and friends may and should actively participate in planning these rites. Working together can aid in the grieving process. There are many options in the rituals that provide for a variety of approaches. The final wishes of the deceased are to be respected to the extent possible.

7 May any of the rites be omitted?

Since the three main rites flow one into another and provide a time of consolation for family members and friends through the liturgy, *it is best to use all three rites.*

PRAYERS AFTER DEATH

8 When should the parish be notified?

The parish office should be notified of a death as soon as possible. The priest or deacon can then meet with the family and pray for the repose of the newly deceased. Arrangements for the Vigil and Funeral Mass are made through the Funeral Home directly.

THE VIGIL

9 What is the difference between a Vigil and a visitation?

A visitation is a gathering of friends who wish to view or be present with the remains of the deceased, console the relatives, reminisce about the past, and share stories of the deceased. A Vigil is the prayer designated in the Ritual and held during a visitation.

10 Where should a Vigil be held?

The Order of Christian Funerals allows for the Vigil to be held in various places. It can be held in the home of the deceased, or a funeral home.

11 Is the recitation of the rosary permitted?

The Vigil is the official prayer designated by the Church for this occasion and is found in the Order of Christian Funerals. It includes prayers for the deceased and recognizes the person's Christian life. The recitation of the rosary and other private devotions are encouraged but should not take the place of the official Vigil.

THE FUNERAL LITURGY

12 When may Funeral Masses be celebrated?

Funeral Masses are celebrated on weekdays or Saturdays at 11:00 A.M. but dependent of the availability of the church and the priest or deacon. The parish office will make arrangements with the funeral home and not with individual family members.

13 What is the site for a Funeral Mass?

The site for a Funeral Mass is the parish church.

14 Can non-Catholics be pallbearers at a Catholic funeral?

Yes, provided those chosen are of good repute.

15 What kind of music is appropriate for a Funeral Mass?

The music ministry is a gift provided by volunteer music ministers. Hymns that are both appropriate and familiar to the music ministers and the parishioners may be used at certain points in the Requiem or Funeral Mass. There is a list to choose from. Solos and secular music are not permitted.

16 May a Funeral Mass be ill-advised in some circumstances?

Only by way of exception should a Funeral Liturgy, distinct from the Mass, be used for a deceased baptized Catholic. Such situations might be the funeral of a person who never or rarely participated in the life of the Church. It would be more advised to celebrate the Funeral Liturgy Outside of Mass at the Funeral Home.

17 How does a homily differ from a eulogy?

A homily breaks open the readings from Sacred Scripture that had been proclaimed, while a eulogy, "to speak well of someone" praises the deceased. The homily takes its theme from the Biblical readings and speaks in general of the Catholic belief in the Resurrection, life after death, and the qualities of Christian living. The virtues of the deceased can be cited as examples. A short homily is appropriate at the Vigil and the Funeral Mass. A eulogy is more appropriate at the funeral home during the visitation, the Vigil or at a family gathering after the Rite of Committal.

THE RITE OF COMMITTAL

18 What is the Rite of Committal?

After the Funeral Mass or Funeral Service without Mass, the body is taken to the cemetery for burial. The Rite of Committal or final farewell is prayed at that time.

19 Where should the Rite of Committal take place?

Ordinarily, the Rite of Committal takes place at the graveside. The prayers of committal recognize that the place of interment or entombment has been transformed by means of Christ's death and resurrection.

20 Must a Catholic be buried in a Catholic Cemetery?

The normal situation is to bury a Catholic in a Catholic cemetery, or in a cemetery with a designated Catholic section. However, a Catholic may be buried in another cemetery due to a lack of Catholic cemeteries. Non-Catholics may also be buried in a Catholic cemetery with Catholic relatives or spouses.

21 Can a flag be substituted for the funeral pall over the casket during the Liturgy?

A flag is permitted before the Mass. It is replaced with the Pall when the casket is brought into the Church for the Funeral Mass.

CREMATION

22 Can Catholics be cremated?

The bodies of Catholics may be cremated. Cremation is permitted as long as the body is not cremated as a protest against the Christian belief in the resurrection of the dead. There is a decided preference for burial of the body. As such, we should try to respect the mind of the Church by preparing financially for a simple and dignified funeral. There are inexpensive yet dignified caskets made by monks that can be preordered which are beautiful way to support the holy monks and have a dignified casket. It is not necessary to purchase a casket through a funeral home. Contact the parish office for more information.

The Church is very clear about the fact that the ashes are to be accorded the same respect as the human body: "The cremated remains of a body should be treated with the same respect given to the human body from which they come. This includes the use of a worthy vessel to contain the ashes, the manner in which they are carried, the care and attention to appropriate placement and transport, and the final disposition. The cremated remains should be buried in a grave or entombed in a mausoleum or columbarium. The practice of scattering cremated remains on the sea, from the air, or on the ground, or keeping cremated remains in the home of a relative or friend of the deceased are not the reverent disposition that the Church requires. Whenever possible, appropriate means for recording with dignity the memory of the deceased should be adopted, such as a plaque or stone which records the name of the deceased" #417 Appendix 2 from Order of Christian Funerals

23 What kind of container is appropriate?

Worthy containers such as the classic funeral urn are appropriate. Keeping the ashes in pieces of jewelry, in statuary, or other objects are unacceptable practices.

24 Where are the ashes to be placed?

The ashes must be placed in a grave or niche in a mausoleum known also as a columbarium. They are never to be kept in the possession of the family, divided or scattered, since these practices are not the reverent disposition the Church requires.

25 May the ashes be present for a Funeral Mass?

It is strongly preferable for the body to be present for the Funeral Mass. The body should be brought back into the Church one last time. After the Mass the body may be cremated. If, for extraordinary reasons, this is not possible, the ashes should be present. If the ashes are not present, the Funeral Mass prescribed in the ritual is not celebrated. In that case a memorial Mass is appropriate.

26 May the ashes be mixed with cremated remains of other individuals, pets, or other objects?

Because of our belief in the resurrection of the body, we find such practices repulsive. This practice has never been acceptable.

PRAYING FOR THE DEAD

27 How can a person pray for the dead?

The traditional way is through Mass offerings. Theology of the Mass offerings are strongly encouraged as a means to pray for the dead through the Sacrifice of the Mass. Having Masses celebrated for the deceased is a laudable Catholic practice. Since Catholics believe in praying for the dead, this remains a fitting way to memorialize the deceased.

The Church also commends prayers throughout the year: "The Catholic Church commends its deceased members to the mercy of God by means of its funeral rites. It likewise asks that the Christian faithful continue to offer prayer for deceased family members and friends. The annual celebration of All Souls Day, the commemoration of all the faithful departed on November 2, attests to this salutary practice. Masses celebrated for the deceased on the anniversaries of death or at other significant times continue the Church's prayer and remembrance. For Catholic Christians, cemeteries, especially Catholic cemeteries, call to mind the resurrection of the dead. In addition, they are the focus for the Church's remembering of the dead and offering of prayer for them" #416 Appendix 2 from Order of Christian Funerals

28 Other ways to memorialize the Dead.

Many times, people remember their parish church in the obituary. Contact the parish office for correct wording of memorials or bequests. In addition, one may have other worthy causes they want to remember in their obituary.

OTHER QUESTIONS

29 May persons pre-plan their funerals?

Yes. It is important that people plan their funeral and make clear their wishes ahead of time. In this way they can be sure that the funeral rites will reflect their Catholic Faith. Such planning also is the best way to avoid heavier financial burdens later. It is also wise to share with relatives one's wishes for the funeral. A simple and dignified funeral is always the best. There is no reason to spend large amounts of money on a casket, limousines, or flowers.

30 May a person donate organs?

The donation of one's organs has become commonplace and is commendable. The donation of the entire body for scientific study is also permitted. In these instances the proper disposition of the body is to be done according to accepted practices.

31 Are there any charges for the Church?

Strictly speaking, No. The church does not charge for Funeral Masses or sacraments or blessings. That is a sin called simony. There is a time-honored custom of giving a stipend to the priest though. Most people give a stipend of \$150. If there is only a Funeral Liturgy outside Mass, the suggested stipend to the priest or deacon is \$75. No one will be denied a Christian burial due to economic burdens. The Catholic Church and her priests and deacons are here to provide comfort and prayers for the mourners, not to make money from their grief. There is no charge for the church, the music ministry, or the luncheon.

Rev 10/20/17