

GUIDELINES FOR CATHOLIC FUNERAL RITES

INTRODUCTION

The Catholic Funeral Rites are celebrations that enable the Christian community to mourn as well as to hope by focusing on the mystery of the death and resurrection of Christ. These guidelines are offered to assist families in effectively preparing the funeral liturgy for their loved one.

SCHEDULING THE FUNERAL LITURGIES

1. The Funeral Mass is generally celebrated in the parish church in the morning.
2. The optional Vigil for the deceased should be celebrated at a convenient time. The time may be published in the newspaper obituary notice.
3. Funeral directors are asked to respect the correct names of the various liturgical rites in written obituary notices. Proper terms such as “Vigil for the Deceased”, “Funeral Mass”, “Funeral Liturgy outside Mass”, and “Rite of Committal” are encouraged.
4. Funeral Masses are not celebrated on solemnities of obligation, on Holy Thursday, Good Friday, Holy Saturday, Easter Sunday, or on the Sundays of Advent, Lent and the Easter Season.
5. Although the Funeral Mass is ordinarily celebrated in the parish church to which the deceased belonged, it is possible to choose any Catholic church for the Funeral Mass, provided the pastor of that church agrees and the pastor of the deceased has been informed. The Funeral Mass may also be celebrated in chapels of Catholic long-term care institutions.
6. The Funeral Mass may be celebrated at one of the regularly scheduled daily Masses in the parish. Particularly in instances where the deceased does not have a large family or circle of friends, the presence of the daily Mass community is extremely consoling to the mourners.
7. ***The parish should be consulted before the date and time of the Funeral Mass are confirmed.***

PREACHING AND EULOGIES

1. Only a priest or deacon may preach the homily at the funeral liturgy. The homily generally focuses on a message of hope and the meaning of Jesus’ resurrection for us.
2. One speaker chosen by the family may offer a five-minute remembrance of the deceased at the Funeral Liturgy before the final commendation. The remarks are to be simple, brief, and prepared (written). Within the context of a liturgy, the tone should remain one of faith and hope.
3. The reception after the liturgy is a more fitting time for individuals to share remembrances of the deceased.
4. A slide show of the life of the deceased is not shown in the church but is more appropriate at the reception following the rites at the cemetery.

THE FUNERAL MASS

1. In the celebration of the Eucharist, the Church most perfectly expresses her communion with those who have died. The celebration of the Eucharist at the funeral is an opportunity for the community of the faithful, and for the family, to “learn to live in communion with the one who has ‘fallen asleep in the Lord.’”
2. The Introductory Rites of the Funeral Mass presume a greeting of the mourners who accompany the deceased to the doors of the church. They are greeted by the priest and other persons who have gathered at the church to await the procession from the funeral home.

MUSIC IN THE FUNERAL LITURGY

1. An instrumentalist, a cantor, and even a choir where possible should assist the full participation of the assembly in the songs, responses, and acclamations of the funeral rites.

2. Certain musical texts are primary and should be sung at the Funeral Mass: the responsorial psalm, the gospel acclamation, the three acclamations of the Eucharistic Prayer, the “Lamb of God” litany.

3. Some form of hymnal or worship program is called for at funerals. The program might be a computer-generated document with the words and music for the liturgy. Copyright licenses and permissions are necessary, and many parishes have found annual licenses to be both convenient and inexpensive. Some liturgical publishers have offered participation cards and booklets for the liturgy that have proven very useful.

4. The selection of music for the funeral liturgy is often a sensitive issue. The request for favorite songs of the deceased often result in inappropriate choices for the solemnity of the funeral liturgy. Sentimental music or songs from Broadway hits are never to substitute for the music and sacred hymns of the funeral liturgy. The question to ask is: Will this hymn help this assembly to pray? Check with the parish before making a final decision on the music.

5. Music is preeminent among the signs expressed by the participants in any liturgy. Therefore, recorded music is not to be used within the liturgy to replace the congregation, the choir, the organist, cantor, or other musicians.

AT THE CEMETERY

The *Rite of Committal* is celebrated at the place of burial or interment and never in the church.

1. The Rite of Committal, whether at an interment chapel, at a mausoleum or at a graveside, is a gathering of the faithful for prayer.

2. Military services and certain cultural or social rites are permissible at the cemetery. These other services should be arranged in advance with the local parish priest and coordinated in such a way that they do not disrupt or distract from the integrity of the liturgical committal service. Funeral directors are called upon to assist in the coordination of these elements and to safeguard the integrity of the Church’s liturgy at the *Rite of Committal*.

3. If a lengthy time has passed since the celebration of the Funeral Liturgy, or if the funeral has been conducted overseas or in a distant state, the *Rite of Committal* with *Final Commendation* may be more appropriate.

CREMATION

While the Church recommends that the pious custom of burying the bodies of the dead be observed, cremation is permitted as long as it has not been chosen for reasons contrary to Catholic teaching.

1. It is preferred that the Funeral Mass be celebrated in the presence of the body of the deceased prior to cremation.

2. The significance of having the body of the deceased present for the funeral liturgy is indicated throughout the Mass texts and ritual actions. Therefore, when arrangements involving cremation are being made, it is recommended that: a) the Funeral Liturgy be celebrated in the presence of the body of the deceased person, and that following the Funeral Liturgy, the body of the deceased be cremated; b) the Funeral Mass conclude with the final commendation in the church; c) at an appropriate time, usually some days later, the family gather at the cemetery for the burial of the cremated remains.

3. If cremation has already taken place before the Funeral Liturgy, the Pastor may permit the celebration of the Funeral Liturgy in the presence of the cremated remains of the deceased person. The cremated remains of the body are to be placed in a worthy vessel. A small table or stand is to be prepared for the cremated remains at the place normally occupied by the coffin. The funeral urn may be carried to its place in the entrance procession or placed on this table sometime before the liturgy begins.

4. Cremated remains should be treated with the same respect given to the remains of a human body, and should be entombed or buried, whether in the ground or at sea. The *scattering* of cremated remains on the ground or on the sea or keeping any portion of them for personal reasons is not the reverent final disposition that the Church directs. It should be noted that burial at sea of cremated remains differs from scattering. An appropriate and worthy container, heavy enough to be sent to its final resting place, may be dropped into the sea.

CUSTOMARY OFFERINGS

1. There is a \$200 fee for a funeral service at St. Joseph Mareello Parish to help defray the costs of utilities and janitorial services.

2. The offering does not include the professional fees for vocalists or musicians. If parish music ministers are available, their fee is \$150 each (with generally two members who are present).

3. A personal donation to the priest or deacon is left to the discretion of the family.

FLOWERS

We welcome flowers as part of the funeral celebration. They will be displayed in the lobby near the baptismal font; one or two floral arrangements may be brought to the sanctuary area and placed to the side of the altar (on the floor just off the steps). The floral casket spray is removed before the funeral liturgy in order that the pall may be placed on the casket; the spray is later returned at the end of the funeral liturgy.

A Final Thought on Catholic Funerals

As members of the body of Christ, when one suffers, we all suffer. Therefore, we are called on as a community to care for the dying, to console those who mourn, and to participate in the funeral rites. The celebration of a Christian funeral brings hope and consolation to the living. Prayerful preparation and planning of the funeral rites will help you and your loved ones deal successfully and gracefully with the ultimate rite of passage through death to eternal life.

Selecting Readings for the Funeral Mass

A selection of readings for the funeral Mass can be found on the web. In your search engine, look for “Catholic Funeral Mass Planner Guide” or visit this website:

www.catholicfunerals.co.nz/httpdocs/index.cfm. When the site opens, click on “Click here to create a funeral planner”, click “Continue”, then click on:

Step 2 at the top. A list of “1st Readings” will appear; choose any one. Remaining on Step 2, choose a Responsorial Psalm. The person(s) presenting the readings at the Funeral Mass should have the readings as soon as possible so they can practice. They are to read slowly and carefully.

Step 3, choose a “Gospel Reading”.

Step 4 presents a list of prayers for the Intercessions or the “Prayer of the Faithful”. Choose any number of prayers listed.

Forward your choice of readings and intercessions to the priest who will celebrate the Funeral Mass.

Preparing a Program / The Order of Mass

When preparing a program for guests to follow during Mass, the basic elements are the following:

- Greeting of the family and blessing of the deceased.
- Entrance song (ProceSSIONal)
- Opening Prayer
- Reading 1 *
- Psalm Response
- (Reading 2)
- Gospel and Homily
- Intercessions
- Offertory Song and Presentation of Bread and Wine
- Eucharistic Prayer
- Communion and Communion Song
- Euology
- Concluding Prayers (Final Commendation) and Recessional Hymn.

If two readings are chosen, Reading 1 is from the Old Testament and Reading 2 is from the New Testament.

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