

Catholic Funeral Rites

"Christians celebrate the funeral rites to offer worship, praise, and thanksgiving to God for the gift of life which has now been returned to God, the author of life and the hope of the just. The Mass, the memorial of Christ's death and resurrection, is the principal celebration of the Christian funeral." ~General Introduction to the Order of Christian Funerals, §5

When a loved one dies, those left behind are filled with the conflicting emotions of intense sorrow and grief, coupled with Christian joy and thankfulness that the suffering is over and everlasting life in heaven is beginning. The Roman Catholic funeral rites offer a beautiful, profound journey through grief and loss to the joy of anticipation of the resurrection of the dead.

The Catholic funeral rites consist of three components:

The Vigil for the Deceased

- Usually the evening before the burial. Usually at the funeral home, but can be done in the narthex of church if the church is available
- The normative format is the readings and prayers that make up the official Vigil for the Deceased, but other options are possible:
- Liturgy of the Word
- Evening Prayer from the Liturgy of the Hours (Office of the Dead)
- Rosary
- This is the best time for a eulogy or shared remembrances

The Mass of Christian Burial

- Celebrated at the parish church, unless special permission is granted by the priest to hold it at a funeral chapel
- This is the central celebration of the Christian funeral
- Due to the nature of the liturgy, eulogies are discouraged at the Mass itself. They are much better done at the Vigil for the Deceased the evening before or at the funeral luncheon. In some circumstances a eulogy at the funeral Mass may be permitted, but there must be only one, and it must be less than 5 minutes. See more detailed guidelines below.

The Rite of Committal

These final prayers before burial are normally prayed at the graveside, as we commit our loved one to the hands of God.

Planning for the Funeral Rite

When you meet with the parish priest or liturgy director, you will receive a copy of the book *Through Death to Life* by Fr. Joseph Champlin (Ave Maria Press). For advance planning, you can also get a copy of this book at the parish office. It contains all the suggested options for Scripture reading and prayers, as well as a handy tear-out planning sheet for you to submit to the priest or liturgy director.

The first thing the priest or deacon will need to know is whether the body will be present or if there are cremated remains. It is preferred that the body be present for the funeral Mass and if cremation is to take place that it be done following the Mass.

Here are some of the choices you'll need to communicate to the parish:

Scripture readings (more information below)

Music choices (more information below)

Is there a visiting priest?

Will anyone be eulogizing following communion?

Do you want a funeral luncheon? How many will be coming?

Routinely provided by a group of parish volunteers (donation)

Usually held in the Parish Hall immediately following Mass or the burial at the cemetery.

Parish Office Staff will provide family with the name and contact information for the Reception Committee to make arrangements for the luncheon. The food will be provided by parish members, who have volunteered for this ministry. The committee will also serve any food the family would supply. Setup, serving and cleanup, will be done for the luncheon by the Reception Committee.

It is customary that a donation is made to the Reception committee for this service.

Scripture Readings

The Catholic Church offers a wide selection of Scripture readings for the funeral rites. You will likely find excellent readings from among this list, but you may choose another Scripture reading if another passage is particularly appropriate for you or your loved one.

You will need to choose 4 Scripture readings for the Mass (see the book *Through Death to Life*):

First Reading from the Old Testament (or from Acts or Revelation in Easter Season)

Responsorial Psalm from the Book of Psalms

Second Reading from the New Testament Epistles

Gospel Reading

The first and second reading may be proclaimed by a family member or friend, or you may ask a parish lector to read them. The readers should have a good grasp of the principles of proclaiming the Word of God in public. Be sure to give them a copy of the reading in advance, and encourage them to practice the reading at the ambo (lectern) in church to get the feel of the acoustics and microphone.

The responsorial psalm should preferably be sung by the cantor, but it can be recited if necessary.

All the passages listed below may be found in the New American Bible which is used in our liturgies.

First Reading from the Old Testament (Pages 37-46 of Through Death to Life. *Denotes most often-used readings.)

2 Maccabees 12:43-46

Job 19:1, 23-27a

*Wisdoms 4:7-15

*Isaiah 25:6a, 7-9

*Lamentations 3:17-26

Daniel 12:1-3

During the Easter Season (Easter to Pentecost) one of the following is used instead of a passage from the Old Testament

Acts 10:34-43 (or shorter version Acts 10:34-36,42-43)

*Revelation 14:13

Revelation 20:11-21:1

*Revelation 21:1-5a, 6b-7

Responsorial Psalm (usually sung by the cantor) (Pages 47-56 of Through Death to Life.

*Denotes most often used readings.)

*Psalm 23:1-3, 4,5,6

*Psalm 25:6 and 7b, 17-18, 20-21

*Psalm 27:1,4,7, and 8b and 9a, 13-14

Psalm 42:2,3,5cdef; 43:3,4,5

*Psalm 63:2, 3-4, 5-6, 8-9

*Psalm 103:8 and 10, 13-14,15-16, 17-18

*Psalm 116:5, 6,10-11,15-16ac

Psalm 122:1-2, 4-05, 6-7, 8-9

*Psalm 130: 1-2, 3-4, 5-6ab, 6c-7, 8

Psalm 143: 1-2, 5-6, 7ab and 8ab, 10

Second Reading from the New Testament Epistles (Pages 58-67 of Through Death to Life.

*Denotes most often used readings.)

Romans 5:5-11

Romans 5:17-21

Romans 6:3-9 (or shorter version Rom 6:3-4,8-9)

Romans 8:14-23

*Romans 8:31b-35, 37-39

Romans 14:7-9, 10c-12

*1 Corinthians 15:20-28 (or shorter version 1 Cor 15:20-23)

1 Corinthians 15:51-57

*2 Corinthians 4:14 – 5:1

2 Corinthians 5:1, 6-10

Philippians 3:20-21

1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

2 Timothy 2:8-13

*1 John 3:1-2

1 John 3:14-16

Gospel Reading (read by the priest or deacon only) (Pages 70-88 of Through Death to Life.
*Denotes most often used readings.) Tell us your preferred choice but homilist may want to choose his own.

Gospel Reading (continued)

*Matthew 5:1-1a

*Matthew 11:25-30

Matthew 25:1-13

Matthew 25:31-46

Mark 15:33-39; 16:1-6 (or shorter version Mk 15:33-39)

Luke 7:11-17

Luke 12:35-40

Luke 23:33, 39-43

Luke 23:44-46, 50,52-53; 24:1-6a (or shorter version Lk 23:44-46,50,52-53)

Luke 24:13-35 (or shorter version-Lk 24:13-16, 28-35)

John 5: 24-29

*John 6:37-40

*John 6:51-59

*John 11:17-27 (or shorter version: John 11:21-27)

John 11:32-35

*John 12:23-28 (or shorter version: John 12:23-26)

*John 14:1-6

John 17:24_26

John 19:17-18, 25-39

Music for the Funeral Mass

The music for the funeral liturgy, as the music at all Catholic liturgy, should encourage the participation of all those present in sung prayer. Our Pastoral Associate for music can help you with this.

Music selections include:

- Prelude music
- Processional
- Psalm
- Preparation of gifts
- Communion
- Recessional

Remuneration for the musicians' time and expertise is expected. This needs to be arranged with musician(s) prior to the funeral.

Please see recommended list from Holy Family Music Ministry below.

Music for Funerals

From the *Breaking Bread* hymnal by OCP

Songs from one group may work in another place. Many of the songs could be either Preparation of Gifts or Communion. I have placed the more familiar in Communion, because those present should sing along if possible at that time, and carrying a songbook is awkward at Communion time. Likewise, some Entrance Songs may be used as Recessionals.

For the Entrance Processional:

Musically, look for something that is more upbeat, that brings us together as a people to celebrate the life we honor this day.

At the Lamb's High Feast We Sing

Be Not Afraid by Bob Dufford

Come Lord Jesus by MD Ridge (for funerals in Advent)

Gather Us In by Marty Haugen

I Heard the Voice of Jesus
I Sing the Mighty Power of God
Lord of All Hopefulness (old Irish melody)
O God, Our Help In Ages Past
Roll Away the Stone by Tom Conry (for funerals in the Easter season or any time)
River of Glory by Dan Schutte
Spirit of God (old Scottish tune) by Christopher Walker
The Living God My Shepherd Is (the 23rd psalm set to an old Irish tune known as Brother James' Air)
The Strife is O'er (not restricted to Easter season for funerals)

Psalm (should be sung)

See *From Death to Life* for a list of recommended texts. Any of those can be sung using our regular psalm melodies.

Owen Alstott's *Psalm 23* is used often – currently #838 in *Breaking Bread*.
For Psalm 23, *Shepherd Me, O God* may be sung.
For psalm 103, *Loving and Forgiving* by Scott Soper

Preparation of the Gifts (used to be called the Offertory)

Musically, this is a more restful time. Many of these may also be used at Communion time.

Christ, Be Our Light by Bernadette Farrell
Dona Nobis Pacem
Eye Has Not Seen by Marty Haugen
Gift of Finest Wheat by Robert E. Kreutz (could also be Communion)
Give Me Jesus traditional spiritual
Holy Darkness by Dan Schutte (based on prayers of St. John of the Cross)
Holy Is His Name by John Michael Talbot
I Have Loved You by Michael Joncas
I Know That My Redeemer Lives by Scott Soper
In Every Age by Janet Sullivan Whitaker
Now We Remain by David Haas (could also be Communion)
Only a Shadow by Carey Landry
Only In God by John Michael Talbot
Open My Eyes, Lord by Jesse Manibusen (also works well for Communion due to ease of singing)
Panis Angelicus (could also be Communion)
Prayer of St. Francis by Sebastian Temple
Precious Lord, Take My Hand Tommy Dorsey
Psalm 42: As the Deer Longs (tune: O Waly Waly)
Shepherd Me O God (if not used for the psalm)
The Lord Is My Light by Christopher Walker
To Be Your Bread Now by David Haas
What Wondrous Love Is This
We Remember by Marty Haugen

You Are Mine by David Haas

You Are Near by Dan Schutte (use the words “O Lord” rather than “Yahweh”)

Communion

Ideally, this should be something everyone can sing along. For medium to large funerals, pick two or more.

Amazing Grace (works well any place in the Mass – many choose it for Recessional)

Behold the Lamb by Martin Willett

Bread of Life by Bernadette Farrell

Christians, Let Us Love One Another

Flow River Flow by Bob Hurd

Hosea Weston Priory (Come back to Me...)

Immaculate Mary

Loving and Forgiving by Scott Soper (may also be used as the psalm)

O Lord, I Am Not Worthy

On Eagle's Wings by Michael Joncas

One Love Released by Robert H. Frenzel & Kevin Keil

Pan de Vida

Peace Is Flowing Like A River by Carey Landry

Resucito' by Kiko Arguello (for funerals in the Easter season where Spanish is spoken)

Softly and Tenderly Jesus Is Calling by Wil L. Thompson

Song of the Body of Christ by David Haas

Soul of My Savior

Taste and See by Bob Hurd (there are four different hymns named *Taste and See* in the 2009 hymnal – this is the most commonly known in HF)

Worthy Is the Lamb by Ricky Manalo, CSP

Song of Farewell

This is sung while the remains are being blessed for the journey to the cemetery.

In Paradisum (in Latin)

Song of Farewell by Ernest Sands (May the choir of angels come to meet you...)

Song of Farewell (tune: Old Hundredth) (Come to his aid, O saints of God...)

Recessional

Like the processional, this should be more upbeat. Many songs work in both spots.

Day Is Done by James D. Quinn, SJ (to an old Welsh tune – *Ar Hyd Y Nos*)

Holy God, We Praise Thy Name

Holy, Holy, Holy

How Can I Keep From Singing

How Great Thou Art by Stuart K. Hine

Irish Blessing by Bob Fabring, SJ (This is the old Irish blessing many know, set to music)

Lead Me, Lord by John D. Becker (Beatitudes)

Lord of the Dance (Shaker tune)

O Loving God by Paulette McCoy (tune: Londonderry Aire or Danny Boy)
The King of Love My Shepherd Is (tune: St. Columba)
We Walk By Faith by Marty Haugen
We Will Rise Again by David Haas

Eulogies

A eulogy, or tribute to the deceased, has in the past often been inserted into the funeral Mass, but current liturgical guidelines strongly discourage this practice.

The Order of Christian Funerals (the Catholic Church document governing Catholic funerals) is quite clear that a brief homily should be given at the funeral liturgy, but never is any kind of eulogy to replace the homily (OCF #141). This does not mean that the deceased cannot be spoken about in the homily, but that the Word of God must be primary. The homilist (priest or deacon) speaks the scriptural word that helps the assembly understand that the mystery of the death and resurrection of Jesus is operative in the life and death of the deceased.

In certain cases, a remembrance by a family member or friend during the funeral Mass may be allowed, either at the beginning of Mass or after communion. This must be arranged with the priest a day or two ahead of time, not minutes before Mass.

If permission is granted for a remembrance or eulogy to be given a Mass, the following guidelines **MUST** be observed:

Only one person may speak (unless translation to another language is needed for the benefit of the assembly)

The remembrance must be brief: no more than 5 minutes

The remembrance should be well prepared in advance so that it is focused and stays within the 5-minute time limit. If possible, a copy should be given to the priest in time to review it before the liturgy.

These guidelines are not meant to squelch remembrance or tribute, but past experience had taught that eulogies are the "wild card" most prone to disaster, with some rambling on for 45 minutes or more, some nearly unintelligible through tears or mumbling, and others used more as a soap box for cult theology than a remembrance of the dead. (All of these cases have indeed happened in the past, and nobody wants them to happen to you!)

A eulogy or eulogies are much more appropriate and successful when presented at the prayer vigil the evening before the funeral, not at the Mass itself. Families are strongly encouraged to utilize this option.

Some Suggestions on Describing the Funeral Rites in the Newspapers

Use "Vigil Service," rather than "Rosary" or "Christian Wake," etc.

Use "Funeral Mass," rather than "Mass of Christian Burial", "Mass of the Resurrection", "Requiem Mass", "Mass of the Angels."

Use "Funeral Liturgy" when the main service in the church is not a Mass.

Use "Memorial Mass" if the body or cremated remains is not present.

Use "Committal Service" or "Committal Service at the Graveside," rather than "Graveside Service."

Summary

The Catholic Church has two thousand years' experience escorting the deceased into the Kingdom of Heaven, and just as much experience consoling those who remain behind. Holy Mother Church's funeral rites offer an unparalleled avenue for remembrance and worship through the throes of grief into the comfort and joy of the resurrection. Prayerful preparations and planning of the funeral liturgy will help you and you loved ones deal successfully and gracefully with the ultimate rite of passage through death to life.

It is customary that an offering be given to the Parish or priest/deacon, the usual amount when arranged through the funeral home is \$250.00. This is a suggestion only and is not mandated.