

LIFE IS CHANGED, NOT ENDED

A GUIDE TO PLANNING THE FUNERAL LITURGY

Burial or Cremation?

One of the initial decisions to make about a funeral is if there will be cremation or burial. The Church allows cremation as long as no disrespect is intended toward the body. If cremation is chosen, the Church would ask that the body still be present for the funeral Mass. As Catholic Christians, we hold a special reverence for the body as the temple of the Holy Spirit.

If it is not possible to have the body present, then the funeral rite calls for the cremated remains to be present at the funeral Mass. If this is not possible, then the Church offers a “Memorial Mass” instead of the Mass of Christian Burial (funeral). The Mass of Christian Burial with a body or with the cremated remains are very similar in ritual and prayers.

If you are not sure what to decide, talk with family members and friends. The priests or the funeral director are also available to give input into your decision.

The Vigil

Once you have decided on cremation or burial, you will need to decide if there will be a Vigil. The Vigil is generally held the night before the Mass of Christian Burial. A Vigil can have several different formats:

- A Scripture Vigil uses readings from the Bible and has special prayers that are said for the deceased and their family and friends.
- A Rosary Vigil is the recitation of the Glorious Mysteries of the Rosary for the deceased. Frequently a Scripture and Rosary Vigil can be combined. The minister for the Vigil can be a priest, another parish minister, a parishioner or even a family member or friend.

Occasionally the Vigil will be done immediately before the Mass. This does not usually happen, but may be necessary depending on individual circumstances. Often a Vigil is not held at all and that is also a very acceptable option.

The Funeral liturgy

The Rite At the Entrance to the church

Just as the Mass of Christian burial is ready to begin, Father, the ministers and family members will gather around the casket or the cremated remains at the baptistery. Father will then bless the body or the cremated remains with holy water as a sign of baptism. Family members or friends will then cover the casket with the pall (the large white cloth used to remind us of our white baptismal garments.) You will need to decide who should place the pall. No pall or white cloth is used for the cremated remains.

The Opening Song of the Mass begins and during the song, the casket is brought to the front of the church. The family and pall bearers follow behind. If there is no casket, but rather an urn, the urn is carried into the church, usually by a family member or friend.

The Opening song is one from our parish music book - “Breaking Bread”. There is a list of suggested songs in this packet.

The Readings

Just as at any Mass, once Father has said the Opening Prayer, the Scripture Readings begin. You may want to help choose the readings, especially if there are some that are particularly meaningful. Father or Teresa Middlemiss will be glad to help direct you.

- The first reading is from the Hebrew Scriptures (the Old Testament).
- This is followed by a sung responsorial psalm. One frequently used at funerals is "The Lord is my Shepherd" - the 23rd Psalm, though there are a variety of other choices.
- The second reading is from one of the New Testament letters.
- Then Father reads a passage from one of the Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke or John).
- You may want to ask family members or friends to read the First and Second Readings. If not, there are several lectors from our parish community who are honored to be asked to read at funerals.

The Homily

- Following the Gospel reading, Father will give a homily relating the life and faith of the deceased to the Gospel message and also to the promise of Christian Resurrection.

The Prayers of the Faithful

- Following the homily, prayers are said for the deceased and for their family members and friends. You may ask a friend or family member to read these prayers, or one of our parish members will. If there is something or someone that you would especially like to be included in these prayers, please be sure to mention that to Father or Teresa.

The Preparation of Gifts

- During this time, the gifts of bread and wine are brought forward. These will be transformed into the Body and Blood of Jesus, which we will receive at Communion. Two or more people are needed to bring up the gifts. This is a good opportunity for children to be involved with the funeral liturgy.
- There is a song during this time.

The Eucharistic Prayer

- This is an ancient prayer of the Church. The word Eucharist means thanksgiving and during this prayer we give thanks to God for His goodness.

The Lord's prayer and communion

- Following the Lord's Prayer is the Greeting of Peace and then Communion.
- Everyone present is invited to come forward during the Communion procession. If someone is not in a position to receive Communion, they are invited to receive a blessing. To indicate this, they should simply cross their arms over their heart as they approach Father.
- You should choose a song to be sung during Communion.
- Following Communion, a meditation song may also be sung.

Remembrances

- Occasionally someone from the family or a special friend may speak about the person who has died. We do this after Communion. We ask that there only be one person giving remembrances and that Father know of this ahead of time. We discourage the practice of asking anyone who wants to speak to come forward. This is more appropriate during the Vigil or even the reception following the funeral. We try to limit the time of remembrances to 3- 5 minutes.

The Final Commendation and Farewell

- The Mass ends with special prayers for the deceased and an incensing of the body or the cremated remains. At the conclusion of these prayers, the closing song begins and the casket or cremated remains are led out of church. Family and friends follow.
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After the Mass

- Once the Mass is finished, you will need to decide if you will go immediately to the cemetery. Some families prefer to do that, while others remain at the church for hospitality and then process to the cemetery later.
- If you would like a reception at the church, either immediately following the Mass, we need to coordinate that with the St. Mary's Women. They may not be available at the time you have chosen. The suggested donation for the reception is \$2.00 per anticipated person.
- Father will go with you to the cemetery for the internment. Some families choose not to have a Mass at all, but rather to have a graveside service. Father or one of the ministers from church can help with that.

A special note on the disposition of the cremated remains

"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 carry the ashes, the manner in which they are carried 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 friend or relative 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." From the Order of Christian Funerals #417