

Guidelines for funerals

When do I need to inform the priest?

It is good to let the priest know if a parishioner or member of your family has died even before you contact a Funeral Director. The priest can begin to pray for the person who has died and offer help and guidance as you prepare for the funeral.

Prayer of Commendation for a Happy Death

Jesus, Mary and Joseph, I give you my heart and my soul. Jesus, Mary and Joseph, assist me in my last agony. Jesus, Mary and Joseph, may I breathe forth my soul in peace with you. Amen .

Prayer for the dying

Hail, holy Queen, Mother of mercy, hail, our life, our sweetness and our hope. To you do we cry, poor banished children of Eve: to you do we send up our sighs, mourning and weeping in this vale of tears. Turn then, most gracious Advocate, your eyes of mercy toward us, and after this our exile, show unto us the blessed fruit of your womb, Jesus, O clement, O loving, O sweet Virgin Mary!

Prayer for the Dead

Eternal rest grant unto them, O Lord, and let perpetual light shine upon them. May ☩ they rest in peace. Amen.

When a Catholic dies, a requiem mass should be offered

When a Catholic dies it is the usual custom of the Catholic Church for them to be brought to their parish church and for a Requiem Mass to be offered up for them. This is the case even for those who during their lifetime rarely practiced their Catholic faith. Catholics believe that when a person dies, it is a priority to offer Mass, because it is the Sacrifice of Christ and, in the Mass, the Church pleads to the Lord, asking him to forgive the sins and weaknesses of the dead person and to admit them into the Communion of the Saints (*Order of Christian Funerals 6*).

Sometimes people think that the chief purpose of a funeral is to ‘remember’ or to ‘celebrate the life’ of the loved one who has died. Catholics do believe that we must thank God profoundly for the gift of having known and loved our departed but the principle reason we offer the Mass is to ask the Lord to join our loved one with the death of Christ so that they might also share his Resurrection. The best form of funeral for a Catholic is a Requiem Mass.

Sometimes people think it is less distressing for the mourners or for non-Catholics that the funeral be a brief service at the cemetery or crematorium, especially if the loved one was not a regularly practising Catholic. Yet this not only deprives the person who has died of the spiritual assistance of

the Mass, but it can also deprive the people and clergy of the Christian community, to which the person belonged, of an opportunity to pray for them, to thank God for their service, and to commend them to the Lord. Experience shows that the Catholic Requiem liturgy, with its impressive symbols and beautiful prayers, can be a powerful source of consolation to the living, even to those of little or no faith.

Burial or Cremation?

When discussing burial or cremation, it is important to remember that for Catholics cremation is permitted only as a stage between death and burial. The cremated remains should eventually be buried in an appropriate place. It is important to note that in *March 2016*, Pope Francis approved the rule that ashes may not simply be scattered. For more information and guidance on this, see http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20160815_ad-resurgendum-cum-christo_en.html

Eulogies and ‘words of remembrance’

The Catholic Church, unlike other communities, does not permit a priest to preach a eulogy at a Requiem Mass, instead, it directs its ministers to preach about ‘God’s compassionate love’ and the death and resurrection of the Lord (*Order of Christian Funerals 27*), nevertheless, most ministers will do their very best to link this to the life and times of the loved one who has died.

Family-members and others who wish to say a few ‘words of remembrance’ at the funeral may be permitted to do so either at the Reception of the body into Church at the Vigil the night before (if there is one) or at the beginning or end of the Requiem Mass or at the graveside or at the crematorium. It should be shown to the priest or deacon first.

Alternatively, the more relaxed context of the wake or gathering afterwards might be more suitable, indeed, this is often the best as it offers a less formal context than the Requiem.

Choosing Music and readings

Only readings from the sacred scriptures and only music with texts that ‘express the paschal mystery of the Lord’s suffering, death and triumph over death’ may be used in church. When choosing music to be played at the funeral, please take care that the texts are ‘related to the readings from scripture’ (*Order of Christian Funerals 31*).

Sometimes people request secular songs and music to be played in church. The Church does not usually permit this, as secular songs and poetry often do not accord with the Church’s faith and her joyful hope in the Lord’s resurrection. The same applies to recorded songs and music with the additional consideration of copyright law. However, such songs etc. might be appropriate after the committal in the Crematorium.

Praying for a happy death

'Into your hands, o Lord, I commend my spirit' (Night Prayer). Catholics are taught to pray that they might be granted a 'happy death.' A Christian death is one accompanied by the sacramental care of the Church and supported by friends and family.

This was the prayer promoted by St. Margaret Mary Alacoque (d. 1690 Paray-le-Monial) and the devotion of keeping holy the nine First Fridays by attending Mass and going to the sacrament of Reconciliation. This helps to keep before us our Christian faith, founded on the Resurrection of the Lord, that in dying we will be going home to meet our loving Saviour, Jesus Christ. Indeed, in this context, here is a prayer we can say every day: *Jesus, Mary and Joseph, I give You my heart and my soul. Jesus, Mary and Joseph, assist me in my last agony. Jesus, Mary and Joseph, may I breath forth my soul in peace with You*