

ARCHDIOCESE OF GROUARD-MCLENNAN GUIDELINES FOR CATHOLIC FUNERAL LITURGIES

The loss of a loved one to death is a time of deep grief and sorrow. One of the sources of consolation and peace is the Church's ministry. By our outreach, we offer a personal presence and a message of hope. By our prayers and liturgy, we ritualize the need to let go and entrust our loved ones to a caring and loving God. This instruction and guidelines are offered to parish leaders, to our own Catholic people and to any who seek to understand the flavor of the funeral and burial practices of the Catholic Church.

[1] Who to contact at the time of death.

In order to ensure that all funeral arrangements are made for a time and day when the church and the Church's ministers are available, we ask that family members wishing a funeral to take place in a Catholic Church make their first contact with their parish. Throughout the process of planning and holding the funeral rites, open communication is needed among all three partners: the family, the funeral home, and the parish. Keep in mind that such a Funeral service is a Catholic worship service, and as such is to be presided over by a Catholic priest, deacon or other appointed minister.

[2] The Catholic funeral liturgy has three distinct parts.

There are three distinct ceremonies that make up the manner in which Catholics are buried:

- (a) the Vigil Prayer Service, usually at the funeral home or church or other suitable place on the evening prior to the funeral itself. In many of our Native communities, this happens in the context of an overnight vigil. It is very appropriate to hold some of the ancillary customs and rituals at the Vigil Service, such as words of remembrance¹, prayers and rites of organizations that the deceased belonged to (such as Canadian Legion, Knights of Columbus, and Catholic Women's League²), PowerPoint presentation or a favorite song of the deceased. The time of the Vigil should be published in the obituary notice as is the case for the Funeral Liturgy.
- (b) the Funeral Liturgy, which normally includes a celebration of the Mass. Bear in mind that there are some general liturgical rules which prohibit a Funeral Mass during certain days and seasons of the Church year³.
- (c) the burial at the cemetery, either of the body in a casket, or of the cremated ashes. While this usually takes place immediately following the funeral Liturgy, it may also happen at a later date or in another town or cemetery. The heart of this rite is the prayer and the actual committal of the body to the earth. There should be at the very

¹ Order of Christian Funerals (hereafter OCF), #109

² If they all try to schedule a "slot" for their group during the wake this may be a burden to the family rather than a comfort. Another option would be to involve these groups in the performance of various parts of the Vigil service: the readings, the Intercessions, or the music.

³ These are: All Sundays, other solemnities of obligation that are not transferred to Sundays (December 25 and January 1) and Holy Thursday and the Easter Triduum. On these days, a Funeral Service without Mass may be celebrated.

least a partial lowering of the coffin so that the sacred symbolism of returning to the soil of creation is not lost completely. This rite is for committal -- it is not to be done at "the door of the church" even if the weather is bad. If weather or other circumstances mean that there is no service at the place of committal, then the rite is not done at all.

[3] Who may be buried by the Catholic Church? (Canons 1183-1185)

Those who have been baptized in the Catholic Church have the right to be buried from the Catholic Church. Included are also those who are catechumens (those preparing to enter the Church, but have not yet completed their initiation). Baptized spouses of Catholics from another Christian Church, or other baptized persons who have had a close relationship to the Church during their life, can also be buried from the Church.⁴

Stillborn children are afforded the same dignity of a Christian burial as the newborn who die.

[4] The Paschal Mystery – the link between baptism and death.

At a funeral liturgy, there are many symbols and references to baptism. The use of holy water, the Easter candle and the pall are all reminders that just as in baptism⁵, a person dies to the old life of sin and is reborn in Jesus Christ, the same is true of our mortal life. The focus of the funeral Mass is the resurrection of Jesus Christ, the source of our hope.

[5] Words of Remembrance? or Eulogy?

By definition, a eulogy is "Praise; a speech or writing in commendation of a living or dead person citing his valuable qualities or services." (*The Lexicon Webster Dictionary*) Because the focus of the funeral liturgy is the person of Jesus Christ and His death and resurrection, to which all baptized are called, a eulogy by this definition would shift the focus off of Christ and onto the deceased person. Eulogies by this definition are therefore not appropriate in a Catholic Funeral Mass. What is permitted, however, is what is termed "Words of Remembrance", by which we might recall the Christian faith and virtues of the deceased. There is not to be "open mic" at the Funeral Liturgy in the church.

For the sake of good order, the following parameters apply to "words of remembrance": they are to be given by one person only; they must be in a written form so they may be read, and shown to the presider beforehand; they can be no longer than seven minutes; if presented at the Funeral Mass, they are to be given either before the greeting of the body at the entrance to the church, or immediately after the opening hymn

⁴ In the event of a family requesting a Catholic funeral for an unbaptized adult, priests are to consult with the archbishop, or in his absence, the vicar general or the chancellor.

⁵ In every case, the funeral pall is to be placed on the casket. In the case of military or police personnel or veterans, the flag may be placed on the casket prior to the Funeral Mass. In such instances, it is recommended that the flag be removed with due dignity and decorum, and the pall placed on the casket. The flag may be placed on a table or other stand in the sanctuary. This is also true of other insignia, including CWL or Knights of Columbus banners and sashes. Bouquets of flowers are to be treated in the same way. At the end of the Mass, as the pall is removed, all such insignia or flowers may be placed back on the casket, with due reverence.

and before the sign of the cross, or just prior to the final commendation if it is a funeral without Mass.⁶

[6] Audio-Visual Presentations.

Audio-visual presentations, such as power-point, are permissible at the wake prayer service or the luncheon, but not in the church at the funeral Mass.

[7] Cremation.

Cremation, once banned by the Church, is now permitted, provided it is not done in defiance of our belief in the resurrection of the body. The Church prefers that cremation take place after the funeral Mass, so that the body may be present at the funeral. If cremation precedes the funeral Mass, the urn with the cremated remains may be placed on a side table near the altar.⁷ However, in this case the sprinkling of holy water and incensing do not take place.

The cremated remains are to be suitably buried in a cemetery plot. They are not to be strewn in nature or kept for an extended period in one's house.

[8] Music.

The Funeral Mass is a Church liturgy, like any Mass celebrated on Sunday. It should therefore have the same joyful spirit, with parts of the Mass sung if at all possible (Lord Have Mercy, Responsorial Psalm, Holy, Holy, Memorial Acclamation, Great Amen). Hymns should be chosen with the same care and from the same repertoire that we would use for Sunday Mass. Taped music or popular secular music is not appropriate at the Funeral Mass.

[9] Stipend for Funerals

While maintaining that spiritual benefits cannot be purchased, there are legitimate expenses associated with the conducting of a funeral. In many parishes of our archdiocese, there has grown up a tradition of a collection being taken up at the Funeral Mass or Service. Where this is the custom, that collection has been deemed to be payment for the use of the church, the services of the priest or deacon and other ministers. Wherever this has been the custom, it may be retained on the advice of the Parish Pastoral Council. This collection is intended only for the church, and not for any other person or charity or cause. Wherever such collection is not taken up, the archdiocesan policy on stipends applies.

[10] Ministers of Word and Sacrament

The offices of lector, server and extraordinary minister of communion should always be exercised by those trained to do so. There are other opportunities during the Funeral Mass to include family members and close friends (e.g. pallbearers, procession of the gifts).

⁶ OCF, #368

⁷ There is some dispute regarding the use of holy water and incense with cremated remains. Appendix IV of the OCF actually states that holy water and incense are not to be used in such cases, while other official sources suggest it these may be used. Until a more definitive statement is given, this matter is left to the discretion of the presider.

[11] Ministers of Other Churches

The Funeral Mass is a Catholic worship service, and as such is to be presided over by a Catholic priest, deacon or other appointed minister. Clergy from other Christian denominations are welcome to proclaim a scripture reading or lead a prayer, at the discretion of the presider. This applies equally at the prayer vigil and the interment at the cemetery.

[12] The Proper Venue for Funerals

Given the rural and northern nature of this archdiocese, our policy on where the funeral rites take place must be flexible. Priority must always be given to holding the Vigil Prayer service in the parish church or funeral home. The ordinary venue for the Funeral Mass (or Funeral Service without Mass) is the parish church. The Funeral Mass is not to be held in a funeral home; the choice of a community hall for the Funeral Mass is appropriate only under extenuating circumstances. Non-Catholic funeral services may take place in a Catholic church only with the permission of the archbishop, or in his absence the vicar general or the chancellor.