



# *Planning a Catholic Funeral*

## *The Three Rites of a Catholic Funeral*

### THE VIGIL (WAKE)

The **vigil** (also called “prayer service” or “wake”) is an occasion for family and friends to gather at the funeral home or a chapel to pray together, grieve together, and remember the life of our loved one. It often includes:

- A viewing of the body or casket when appropriate
- Scripture reading, singing, intercessory prayer
- Displays of memorabilia and flowers
- Eulogies or sharing of precious memories of the departed

### THE FUNERAL LITURGY

The **funeral liturgy** normally takes the form of a Funeral Mass, which is held at the parish church. It is also possible to celebrate a “Funeral Liturgy Outside of Mass” in cases where the pastor and family deem it appropriate not to celebrate a Mass. The funeral liturgy is the place for the following:

- To give thanks and praise to God for Christ’s victory over sin and death.
- To commend the deceased to God’s tender mercy and compassion.
- To seek strength in the proclamation of the life, death, and resurrection of Christ.
- To celebrate special ritual moments such as the procession of the casket, the placing of the pall, and the song of farewell, which help us to grieve with hope and support.

### THE BURIAL (COMMITTAL)

The **burial** (also called the “committal”), takes place at the cemetery after the funeral liturgy. It may occur immediately after the funeral or at another time. The committal includes:

- Brief prayers, scripture reading, the Lord’s Prayer (“Our Father”), and a blessing of the remains.
- Military honors for veterans.
- Placing flowers or earth on the casket if desired.
- The casket may be lowered into the ground.
- Cremated remains are either buried or entombed in a mausoleum.

*This funeral planning guide is meant to be used in the following ways:*

*1. To plan the funeral of a loved one who has died, guided by the parish priest who will be celebrating the funeral.*

*2. To prepare for your own funeral at a pre-planning workshop led by your parish priest, so that informed choices can guide your family’s planning for your funeral.*

*Eye has not seen,  
nor ear heard,  
nor has the heart  
of man conceived,  
what God has prepared  
for those who love Him.*

*— 1 Cor. 2:9*



# Traditional Burial or Cremation?

*The Catholic Church has always preferred traditional burial over cremation, as it better expresses the reverence and beliefs we hold regarding the human body. Although cremation is now permitted by the Church, it does not enjoy the same value as burial of the body. Please read the following to understand our beliefs about the human body and when and how cremation is allowed.*

*All quotations are from the "Order of Christian Funerals: Appendix on Cremation", NCCB, 1997.*

## WHAT WE BELIEVE ABOUT THE HUMAN BODY

As Catholics, we believe that the human person is made of a body and a soul, both of which are sacred. Our immortal soul is the invisible part of us which gives us life. Our mortal body is the visible part of us which communicates that life to all around us. We know each others' souls because of what our bodies show: smiles, caresses, acts of kindness, singing, dancing, etc. St. John Paul II explained this by saying, "The body reveals the person." Our reverence for the body is expressed in the Sacraments: the body is "washed in baptism, anointed with the oil of salvation, and fed with the Bread of Life" (n. 412). We believe that the body is so truly a part of "who we are" that the soul is not meant to be without it forever, and at the end of time our bodies will be reunited with our souls in the resurrection of the body.



## WHY WE PREFER TRADITIONAL BURIAL



St. Paul and the earliest Christians often referred to Christians who had passed away as "those who have fallen asleep" (1 Cor. 15:18). They believed that the bodies of the dead would one day be reunited with their souls in heaven, just as Christ's body was raised from the dead and ascended into heaven. Traditional burial has always been a way that Christians placed the bodies of "those who have fallen asleep" to rest until they are raised again. Cremation, on the other hand, represented in non-Christian religions either the soul being freed from the body as from a prison, or the end of the individual's existence altogether. It is because of our deep reverence for the human body as a part of who we are, and our hope in the resurrection, that we prefer to "lay our brother/sister to rest" in traditional burial.

## WHEN WE ALLOW CREMATION

Though the Church prefers traditional burial, she allows cremation when the following conditions are met:

- Whenever possible, the body should be present for the funeral. It can be subsequently cremated, either immediately following the funeral or at a later time.
- The remains must be stored in a worthy vessel (an urn which is made of solid material, beautiful, and dignified).
- The remains **must be buried** in a grave **or entombed** in a mausoleum or columbarium.
- The remains **may not be scattered** on the sea, from the air, or on the ground, **or kept in the home** of a relative or friend. No part of the remains should be separated out from the whole (eg. kept in a locket).
- Whenever possible, a memorial plaque or stone should mark the place where the remains are buried.



# Planning the Funeral Liturgy

## INTRODUCTORY RITES

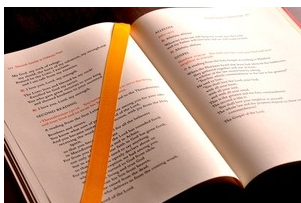
The funeral liturgy usually begins in the back of the church. The family gathers with the priest around the casket. The following normally take place:



- The casket is sprinkled with **holy water** as a reminder of baptism.
- A **pall** is draped over the casket. The pall is a large white cloth which represents the white garment worn at baptism. It is not permissible to substitute a flag or quilt for the pall.
- During this rite, **Christian symbols** such as a Bible or cross may be placed on the casket. Other items (such as memorabilia) are best displayed at the vigil.
- The casket is borne or accompanied in procession to the front of the church by those chosen to be **pall-bearers** (generally six people).
- During the procession, an **Entrance Chant** is sung.

## THE LITURGY OF THE WORD

The Liturgy of the Word is a time for God to speak his words of consolation to us through Sacred Scripture. In consultation with the family, the priest chooses the readings that will best speak to mourners. The following are the parts of the Liturgy of the Word:



- First Reading
  - From Old Testament except in Easter Season
  - **Reader** chosen with the priest
- Responsorial Psalm
  - Must be a psalm chosen from the Lectionary
  - Cannot be substituted with song or poem
  - Usually sung by a **cantor**
- Second Reading
  - From New Testament
  - **Reader** chosen with the priest
- Gospel Acclamation
- Gospel Reading (read by priest or deacon)
- Homily (given by priest)
- Prayers of the Faithful (intercessions)

## THE LITURGY OF THE EUCHARIST

The liturgy of the Eucharist is where we unite our sorrow and love with the sacrifice of Christ on the cross, made present in the Eucharist. Through Jesus truly present here on earth, we are united with our loved one in the closest way possible when we receive Holy Communion.



Below are the parts of the Liturgy of the Eucharist:

- Preparation of the gifts, during which an **Offertory Chant or Hymn** is sung. Two family members may be chosen as **gift-bearers** to bring up the bread and wine used for the consecration of Holy Eucharist.
- Eucharistic Prayers (An appropriate **Mass setting** may be sung for the acclamations.)
- Communion Rite, during which we receive the true Body and Blood of Jesus in Holy Communion. Non-Catholics and Catholics who have not been active in their Catholic faith do not receive Holy Communion out of reverence for its significance.
- To read more about the guidelines for Holy Communion, visit [www.dnu.org/funeral-planning](http://www.dnu.org/funeral-planning).
- The **Communion Chant** is begun while the priest is receiving, and may be followed by a **hymn**.

## THE FINAL COMMENDATION

The final commendation brings closure to the funeral liturgy. It ends as the funeral began, with a procession of the casket, this time to our loved one's final resting place. It includes:



- Prayers for the deceased, led by the priest and offered by all in silence.
- Incensing of the casket by the priest as a sign of reverence.
- The **song of farewell**, sung by all.
- Prayer of Commendation, led by the priest.
- Procession of the casket out of the church, followed by the family and mourners. A **recessional hymn** is sung.

To view options of readings for the funeral, visit [www.dnu.org/funeral-readings](http://www.dnu.org/funeral-readings)

For suggestions and guidelines regarding sacred music for the funeral, please see **page 4-5**.



**“In the celebration of funerals, a dignified simplicity should be observed.”**

*Music for funerals is rich in tradition, beauty, and simplicity. Sacred texts and sounds should hold pride of place. While favorite popular songs may hold specific meaning to the deceased and the family, this type of music is not appropriate for Mass, and is better used during the wake. The Roman Missal, Order of Christian Funerals, and other liturgical books provide specific texts, beautiful sung prayers which make up the body of music for the funeral rite.*

*To listen and view options for the entrance chant, song of farewell, recessional, and other music, visit [www.dnu.org/funeral-music](http://www.dnu.org/funeral-music).*

**ENTRANCE CHANT** \***DIOCESAN RESOURCES A 2, B 2**  
The entrance chant is sung during the opening procession. A responsorial setting alternating cantor/choir with people is recommended.

**“Grant them eternal rest, O Lord,  
and let perpetual light shine upon them.”** *Psalm 64*

**RESPONSORIAL PSALM** **A 3, B 3**  
The Psalms enable the assembly to pray in the words that Jesus himself used during his life on earth. As the authors intended, the Psalms are meant to be sung. Psalm texts should come from the Lectionary and cannot be replaced by another hymn or song even if that text is scriptural.

**“The Lord is my Shepherd,  
there is nothing I shall want.”** *Psalm 23*

**OFFERTORY** **B 4**  
The offertory chant or another suitable hymn is sung.  
**“Out of the depths have I cried to you, O Lord;  
Lord, hear my voice.”** *Psalm 130*

**MASS SETTING** **B 4-7**  
A primary way for the congregation to join in song is the Mass Ordinary. The Roman Missal contains its own set of simple chants, traditionally sung for Funerals. These chants, in Latin or English, can be sung with or without accompaniment and best correspond to the priest’s sung or spoken responses.

**“Holy, Holy, Holy Lord, God of hosts...”  
“We proclaim your death O Lord...”  
“Amen.”  
“Lamb of God...”**

**COMMUNION** **B 7**  
While the priest is receiving the Sacrament, the Communion Chant is begun. Additionally a hymn may be sung at this time. A congregational refrain often works better than through composed hymnody. Eucharistic hymns should always be Catholic in doctrine.

**“Let perpetual light shine upon them,  
with your Saints for ever, for you are merciful.”**

**SONG OF FAREWELL** **A 8, B 8**  
The song of farewell should normally be sung by all, but may also be sung by a choir. As with Antiphons and prayers for Mass, this has a prescribed text which should normally be sung:

**“Come to his/her aid o saints of God!  
Hasten to meet him, angels of the Lord!  
Receive his soul and present him to God  
the Most High.”**

**RECESSIONAL TO COMMITTAL** **A 9, B 9**  
A beautiful prayer is sung accompanying the soul of our loved one on the journey to heaven. There are many settings of the *In Paradisum* available, which prays for the deceased:

**“May the Angels lead you into paradise  
may the Martyrs come to welcome you  
and bring you to the holy city,  
the new and eternal Jerusalem.”**



eternal rest grant unto them, O Lord, and may perpetual light shine upon them.

— Entrance Antiphon for Funerals & All Souls Day

# The Funeral Liturgy

## Sacred Music: Additional Options

*In addition to the Mass Propers, which hold pride of place, there are many other God-centered pieces of music for Funerals. Care should be taken that hymns do not simply replace the proper texts, which are prayers for the dead.*

### +HYMNS FOR OFFERTORY & COMMUNION

Be Thou My Vision **B 11-33**  
The Call  
Christ be beside Me  
The Day of Resurrection  
For All the Saints  
Holy God, We Praise Thy Name  
I am the Resurrection  
I Heard the Voice of Jesus Say  
I Know that my Redeemer Lives  
Jerusalem, My Happy Home  
Jesus, Lead the Way  
The King of Love my Shepherd Is  
Lord Jesus Christ, O Glorious King  
Lord Jesus, Think on Me  
Lord of All Hopefulness  
Love Divine All Loves Excelling  
My Shepherd will Supply my Need  
O God, Our Help in Ages Past  
O God, You Search Me  
On this Day, O Beautiful Mother  
Panis Angelicus  
Soul of my Savior  
You Satisfy the Hungry Heart

### SEASONAL AND DEVOTIONAL MUSIC

All creatures of our God and King (Easter)  
Ave Maria (Schubert, Bach/Gounod, etc.)  
Comfort, comfort, O my people (Advent)  
Jesus walked this Lonesome Valley (Lent)  
Jesus Remember Me (Lent)  
Lord, You Have the Words—Ps 19  
O Sun of Justice (Lent)  
Of the Father's love begotten (Christmas)  
Panis Angelicus (Franck)  
Pie Jesu (Fauré: Requiem Opus 48)  
Remember Your Love (Lent)  
The strife is o'er (Easter)  
Wait for the Lord (Advent)  
When the King shall come again (Advent)

### CHORAL MUSIC

Agnus Dei (various settings)  
Ave Maria (Arcadelt, Grieg, chant, various)  
Ave Verum Corpus (Mozart)  
Give Rest O Christ (anonymous)  
God Be in My Head (Davies)  
God So Loved the World (Stainer)  
Hope Thou in God (Mendelssohn)  
How Lovely is Thy Dwelling Place (Brahms)  
In Paradisum (chant, Faure, various)  
My Shepherd will Supply my Need (arr. Thomson)  
Nunc Dimittis (various)  
Sicut Cervus (Palestrina)  
The Call (Vaughan Williams)  
The Lord Is My Shepherd (various)  
Thou Knowest, Lord, the Secrets (Purcell)



### \* DIOCESAN PEW RESOURCES FOR FUNERALS

#### Permanent Pew Resource (A)

A guide for the Funeral Liturgy including evangelistic quotations, a full Order of the Mass, entrance chant, song of farewell, and recessional options.

#### Permanent Pew Resource (B)

A complete guide for the Funeral Liturgy, including a full Order of Mass, sung antiphons, Mass parts, and +Hymns.

For printable worship aids, audio samples and other music resources, visit [www.dnu.org/funeral-music](http://www.dnu.org/funeral-music).



# Frequently Asked Questions

**Why should the funeral usually be a Mass? When is it appropriate not to celebrate a Mass?**

*The funeral should usually be a Mass because the Mass is the most powerful prayer we are able to offer for our loved one who has died. The Mass is a taste of heaven on earth; at Mass we enter into the worship of the angels and saints in heaven, and we are united with those who are being purified in purgatory. Therefore, we are never closer to those who have died than when we are at Mass! (See Order of Christian Funerals n. 154)*

*It is appropriate not to celebrate a Mass when there are pastoral reasons not to. For example, if most of the family is not Catholic and might have difficulty participating in the Mass. However, these cases should be carefully discerned, especially when the person who has died may have desired a funeral Mass.*

*If the funeral is celebrated outside of Mass, a Mass should be offered at a later time for the soul of the deceased.*

**If we plan to cremate the remains, is it permissible to do so prior to the funeral liturgy?**

*The Catholic Church clearly prefers and urges that the body of the deceased be present for the funeral liturgy, since the presence of the human body better expresses our belief that the body is truly a part of the person, and that this same body will be resurrected at the end of time. (See Order of Christian Funerals Appendix n. 413-415)*

*In extraordinary circumstances, it is possible to cremate the body before the funeral liturgy. This should be discerned with the pastor. For more about cremation, see page 2.*

**Why do we use incense?**

*Incense is an ancient liturgical practice that symbolizes our prayer and worship; as the fragrant smoke rises upward, our prayers rise to the heavenly throne. Its use at funerals is a special act of reverence for the body of the deceased, as we offer our loved one back to God and pray for his/her soul.*

*Many churches use a hypo-allergenic type of incense to which there is no allergic reaction.*

**Can a family member or friend give a eulogy (remarks of remembrance) at the funeral liturgy?**

*The funeral liturgy is not the best time for a eulogy (a speech in praise of the deceased) because the focus of the funeral is to pray fervently for our loved one that they may enter quickly into eternal happiness. While a eulogy looks back on a person's earthly life which has ended, the funeral liturgy looks forward to the future—to his/her heavenly life which is just beginning!*

*A eulogy by friends and family, or a sharing of stories from the person's life, is better suited to the vigil (wake). It is permissible, however, for a friend or family member to give brief remarks in remembrance of the deceased after the Prayer after Communion.*

**Can favorite songs be sung or played, even if they do not have Christian words?**

*Only sacred music, that is, music with sacred words and a sacred sound, may be used in the liturgy. For more about funeral music, see pages 4-5.*

*It is difficult for us to imagine how beautiful heaven actually is, and how much greater its joys are than those of earth. Though our loved one may have enjoyed a certain song during his/her lifetime, from now on we hope that he/she will be singing the songs of heaven. During the liturgy, we are able to join our loved ones in that heavenly song!*

**Can a slideshow of pictures or display of memorabilia be shown during the liturgy?**

*A slideshow of pictures or display of memorabilia is better displayed at the vigil (wake). The vigil is more properly a time to remember the earthly life of our loved one, while the funeral liturgy looks forward to heaven. The Mass is a special time when we can "take a peek" at the glory of God, whose loving face is so beautiful that all earthly joys pale in comparison.*

*Similarly, items of memorabilia should not be brought up in procession during the liturgy.*

# Funeral Planning Form

*This form is to assist you either in pre-planning your own funeral, or preparing for the funeral of a loved one who has recently died. It should be completed under the guidance of your parish priest. The priest may need to make pastoral or theological judgments which take precedence over the wishes designated in this form.*

NAME: \_\_\_\_\_ Date of Birth: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_ Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Immediate Family Members: \_\_\_\_\_

## BURIAL

Have you purchased burial rights in a cemetery? No\_\_ Yes\_\_ Which one? \_\_\_\_\_

*The Catholic Church has always preferred traditional burial over cremation, as it better expresses the reverence and beliefs we hold regarding the human body. Although cremation is now permitted by the Church, it does not enjoy the same value as burial of the body. Anyone choosing cremation should understand that whenever possible, the body should be present in a casket for the funeral liturgy. In addition, cremated remains must be buried or entombed in a mausoleum.*

Traditional burial (in a casket) or cremation? \_\_\_\_\_

Clothes to be buried in: \_\_\_\_\_

## VIGIL (WAKE)

Do you wish to have a vigil (wake) prior to the funeral liturgy? \_\_\_\_\_

*The priest prepares a simple prayer service with scripture and prayers for the person who has died. Additional elements may be included in the vigil. Designate any which are preferred:*

Rosary\_\_\_\_\_ Sharing of Memories\_\_\_\_\_ Display of Memorabilia\_\_\_\_\_ Video/Slideshow\_\_\_\_\_

Eulogy (please designate who will give) \_\_\_\_\_

Other \_\_\_\_\_

## FUNERAL LITURGY

*The funeral should usually be a Mass because the Mass is the most powerful prayer we are able to offer for those who have died. It is also the closest possible way for us to be united with those who have died. However, for pastoral reasons, the funeral liturgy may be celebrated outside of the context of a Mass.*

Do you wish to celebrate a funeral Mass? \_\_\_\_\_ Name of Church \_\_\_\_\_

## Pall Bearers:

1. \_\_\_\_\_ 2. \_\_\_\_\_

3. \_\_\_\_\_ 4. \_\_\_\_\_

5. \_\_\_\_\_ 6. \_\_\_\_\_

# Funeral Planning Form (side 2)

## LITURGICAL MINISTERS:

*This section may be left blank if pre-planning.*

Organist: \_\_\_\_\_

Cantor/Choir: \_\_\_\_\_

Readers:

1st Reading: \_\_\_\_\_

2nd Reading: \_\_\_\_\_

Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion:

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Altar Servers: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Gift-Bearers (bring bread and wine at offertory)

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

## SCRIPTURE READINGS:

*For a list of the options for readings, visit [www.dnu.org/funeral-readings](http://www.dnu.org/funeral-readings), or contact your priest.*

1st Reading (Old Testament except during Easter):

\_\_\_\_\_

2nd Reading: (New Testament):

\_\_\_\_\_

Responsorial Psalm:

\_\_\_\_\_

Gospel Reading:

\_\_\_\_\_

## MUSIC SELECTIONS:

*The music chosen for a funeral should be sacred music; that is, it should have both sacred words and a sacred sound. It should also reflect the specific character of a funeral, reflecting the themes of resurrection, heaven, salvation, faith, hope, and love. Music selections must be approved by the priest celebrating the funeral.*

*See pages 4-5 for guidance in choosing music.*

*A solo or choral piece is most appropriate at offertory or after communion.*

Entrance Chant (select one)

☐ "Grant Them Eternal Rest"

☐ Other \_\_\_\_\_

Offertory/Preparation of the Gifts:

\_\_\_\_\_

*A particular Mass setting is often designated by the parish. This may be left blank if pre-planning.*

Mass Setting: \_\_\_\_\_

Communion Chant: \_\_\_\_\_

Hymn or Solo: \_\_\_\_\_

Song of Farewell (select one):

☐ "Come to his/her Aid o Saints of God"

☐ Other \_\_\_\_\_

Recessional Song (select one):

☐ "May the Angels Lead You into Paradise"

☐ "In Paradisum"

☐ Other \_\_\_\_\_



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