

FUNERAL PLANNING GUIDELINES FOR THE
MASS OF CHRISTIAN BURIAL
SAINT MARK CATHOLIC CHURCH

Introduction: Upon the death of a loved one, please contact the funeral home so that they may assist you in making the necessary funeral arrangements. We encourage parishioners to do pre-planning to make a difficult time easier for your family. Funeral Services are very willing to help you in this process. Normally, the funeral home will contact the parish to secure the date and time of the funeral. At St. Mark we will do everything we can to accommodate family needs, but please know that as a busy parish the church may be in use for other events during the time period first chosen.

Once the date and time have been decided, the family will be contacted by one of the parish priests or deacons to plan the Mass of Christian burial and other funeral rites. This involves choosing readings, hymnody and discussing how family and friends might be involved in the funeral liturgy. While there is always an element of the funeral rites that are personalized to reflect the life of the deceased, it should always be remembered that Christians celebrate the funeral rites to offer worship, praise, and thanksgiving to God for the gift of a 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 (*Order of Christian Funerals*, no. 5).

Catholic funeral rites consist of three principal parts or movements: the vigil or wake, the Mass of Christian Burial, and the burial rites. Each of these will be discussed briefly below:

The Vigil for the Deceased (Sometimes called the Wake)

The Vigil for the deceased is the principal rite celebrated by the Christian community in the time following death and before the funeral liturgy. At the vigil the Christian community keeps watch with the family in prayer to the God of mercy and finds strength in Christ's presence.

The Vigil can be celebrated at the funeral home, the home of the deceased or at the parish church. During the course of the Vigil service, there will be a brief proclamation of the Word of God, intercessory prayer, and blessing. If someone in the family would like to offer a personal remembrance of the deceased (eulogy) this may be done at the conclusion of the Vigil service.

The Funeral Liturgy/Mass of Christian Burial

The funeral liturgy is the central celebration of the Christian community for the deceased. At the funeral liturgy the community gathers with the family and friends of the deceased to give praise and thanks to God for Christ's victory over sin and death, to commend the deceased to God's tender mercy and compassion, and to seek strength in the proclamation of the paschal mystery. Through the Holy Spirit the community is joined together in faith as one Body in Christ to reaffirm in sign and symbol, word and gesture that each believer through baptism shares in Christ's death and resurrection and can look for the day when all the elect will be raised up and united in the kingdom of light and peace (*OCF*, 129). The funeral Mass includes the reception of the body, the celebration of the Liturgy of the Word, the Liturgy of the Eucharist, and final commendation and farewell.

Reception of the Body – The rite of reception takes place at the beginning of the funeral liturgy or Mass. It begins with the greeting of the family, the sprinkling of the coffin with holy water as a reminder of baptism, and the placing of the pall which symbolizes the baptismal garment. If the family so chooses, they may drape the pall over the coffin of the deceased.

The entrance procession follows with the ministers leading the coffin and family members into the church. During the procession an entrance hymn will be sung. The family remains standing with the remainder of the congregation in the pews until the conclusion of the opening prayer. It is our practice at St. Mark to place a crucifix and bible on the coffin at the conclusion of the entrance procession. These symbols of Christian life are carried in the entrance procession and can be placed on the coffin by family members of the family chooses to do so. Otherwise, they will be placed by one of the ministers.

Liturgy of the Word

Following the opening prayer, the Liturgy of the Word begins. The readings include an Old Testament reading (during the Easter season the first reading is taken from the *Acts of the Apostles* or the *Book of Revelation*), a Responsorial Psalm (sung), a New Testament reading, and a Gospel reading. The *Order for Christian Funerals* provides a complete listing of the Scripture readings that can be used in the Funeral rites, and the family is encouraged to assist in making the selections of readings for the funeral. In addition, members of the family or friends of the deceased are invited to assist by serving as readers. During the funeral Mass, those who read, since they are exercising a ministry of the Church, are to be practicing members of the Catholic Church.

Liturgy of the Eucharist

At the funeral Mass, the community having been nourished by the Word of God, turns for spiritual nourishment to the Eucharistic sacrifice in which the community with the priest offers to the Father the sacrifice of the New Covenant. The Liturgy of the Eucharist takes place in the usual manner. Members of the family or friends of the deceased should bring the gifts to the altar.

Final Commendation and Farewell

The final commendation is a final farewell by the members of the community, an act of respect for one of their members, whom they entrust to the tender and merciful embrace of God. During the rite, the body is again sprinkled with Holy water and incensed. The sprinkling is a reminder that through baptism the person was marked for eternal life and incensation signifies respect for the body as the temple of the Holy Spirit.

Procession to the Place of Committal

At the conclusion of the funeral liturgy, the procession is formed and the body is accompanied to the place of committal. This final procession of the funeral rite mirrors the journey of human life as a pilgrimage to God's kingdom of peace and light, the new and eternal Jerusalem.

Rite of Committal

The rite of committal, the conclusion of the funeral rites, is the final act of the community of faith in caring for the body of its deceased member. In committing the body to its resting place, the community expresses its hope that, with all who have gone before marked with the sign of faith, the deceased awaits the glory of the resurrection. It normally takes place beside the grave or mausoleum where the body of the deceased is to be placed.

General Considerations

Cremation

The body of the deceased Catholic Christian is also the body once washed in baptism, anointed with the oil of salvation and fed with the Bread of Life. Thus, the Church's reverence for the sacredness of the human body grows out of a reverence and concern both natural and supernatural for the human person. The body of the deceased brings forcefully to mind the Church's conviction in Christ that the body is a temple of the Holy Spirit and is destined for future glory at the resurrection of the dead. This conviction in faith finds its expression in a sustained and insistent prayer that commends the deceased person to God's merciful care so that his or her place in the communion of the just may be assured. A further expression is the care traditionally taken to prepare the bodies of the deceased for a burial that befits their dignity, in expectation of their final resurrection in the Lord.

Although cremation is now permitted by the Church, it does not enjoy the same value as burial of the body. The Church clearly prefers and urges that the body of the deceased be present for the funeral rites, since the presence of the human body better expresses the values which the Church affirms in those rites. If because of special or extraordinary circumstances cremation is chosen, this should follow the funeral liturgy. If this is not possible, the cremated remains will be placed in the church prior to the funeral liturgy and the normal rite of reception will be omitted. When the funeral liturgy begins, the cremated remains will be brought to the Narthex where the opening rite will take place. Following this opening rite, the cremated remains will be carried in procession to the front of the church and place on the table.

Committal

The Catholic Church commends its deceased members to the mercy of God by means of its funeral rites. She likewise asks that the Christian faithful continue to offer prayer for deceased family members and friends. The cremated remains of a body should be treated with the same respect given to the human body from which they come. 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 relative or friend of the deceased are not the reverent disposition the Church requires.

If the body of the deceased is to be cremated, arrangements for the committal of the cremated remains must be made prior to the celebration of the funeral rites at St. Mark. No funeral rites may be celebrated if the remains are not going to be buried or entombed as is proper and right for the Christian faithful. If committal is to take place in another state, the funeral home or family is asked to provide a letter indicating when and where the final committal will occur.

Eulogies

Personal remembrances of the faithful departed by friends and family is often helpful in the grieving process. As noted above, the normal setting for such remembrance is the Vigil for the Deceased. Eulogies may also be offered at the Rite of Committal. If there is no Vigil Service and the Rite of Committal is delayed, one eulogy may be offered on the day of the Funeral liturgy. It may be 3-5 minutes in length and will be offered after the conclusion of Mass and prior to the Final Commendation and Farewell. When the

eulogy is to be offered at the end of Mass, a written copy must be submitted to the parish office at least one day in advance.

Fees

It is customary for the family to make an offering to the parish to cover the expenses of the music minister as well as the clergy. The suggested amount at St. Mark is \$100 for the priest, \$75 for an assisting deacon and \$75 for the music minister. These fees are normally collected as part of the funeral expenses and forwarded to the parish by the funeral home. In a situation where such an offering would cause undue burden to the family, the parish will absorb this cost.

THE SYMBOLS OF THE FUNERAL RITES OF THE CHURCH

Vestments – The colors of liturgical vestments are used to indicate the liturgical feast or nature of the celebration. For funerals white, violet or black vestments may be used. The funeral rites of the Church celebrate our hope in the resurrection while at the same time realizing the reality of human loss and sadness along with the importance of praying for the deceased, especially our brothers and sisters who are being purified after death.

Paschal (Easter) Candle – The Paschal Candle represents the Risen Christ and tells us that He has conquered sin and death. The light of Christ scatters the darkness and invites us to exercise always the virtue of hope. The candle is placed near the coffin (or remains) as a reminder that the deceased brother or sister in Christ, through death, shares in Jesus' victory over sin and death.

Holy Water – We are first introduced into Christ and share in His resurrection through the sacrament of baptism. During the celebration of that sacrament water was poured over us and made us members of Christ and His Church and making us temples of the Holy Spirit. When the casket is sprinkled with Holy Water, it serves to recall that initial washing and purification in baptism which gives us the basis for hoping for the resurrection to eternal life.

The Funeral Pall – A white pall is spread over the casket during the Rite of Reception as a reminder of the white garment used at baptism. It is a sign of the Christian dignity of the deceased person and reminds us that in the eyes of God we are all equal.

Incense – As Christians we believe that the body is the temple of the Holy Spirit and one day will be resurrected by God's mighty power. During the funeral liturgy the body may be incensed as a sign of respect for the deceased. Incense used during other parts of the Mass signify the sacredness of the actions taking place and the prayers of God's people ascending to heaven.

Crucifix – The crucifix is a sacramental and a reminder of the saving sacrifice of Christ who was raised up that we might be saved.

The Holy Bible – The Bible contains the inspired Word of God through which He reveals Himself to His people. It is a reminder that "man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes forth from the mouth of God (*Matthew 4:4*).