

We Remember...

We Acknowledge...

We Hope...



Guidelines to Aid Funeral Directors
in Planning Catholic Funerals
in the
Diocese of Paisley

Beloved Child of God, we entrust you to
Him Who created you.
May you return to the One Who formed
you from the dust of this earth.
May Mary, the angels, and all the saints
come to meet you as you go forth from
this life.
May Christ, Who was crucified for you
bring you freedom and peace.
May Christ, the Son of God, Who died
for you take you into His kingdom.
May Christ, the Good Shepherd, give you
a place within His flock.
May He forgive your sins and keep you
among His people.
May you see your Redeemer face to face
and enjoy the sight of God forever.

Amen

Introduction

THE CHURCH offers an understanding of how the death of loved ones should be observed that is three-fold. It goes without saying that we remember the person who has passed away, as we gather in gratitude for the life shared together. However, and rather differently from other ways of observing death which are increasingly widespread among us today, we also use these rites to acknowledge the pain, grief, and confusion of those left behind. We acknowledge the reality of grief for those left behind rather than simply celebrate the life of the one who has passed away. Finally, we pray in hope for a shared resurrection. All three, remembrance, acknowledgement and hope, are equally important.

What to Expect

THE PARISH PRIEST will meet with the family to help plan a funeral which reflects the Catholic understanding of our relationship with God and how best to respond to the death of a loved one.

The Parish Priest is, of course, bound to follow Catholic traditions as well as Church and local civil law. He will meet with the family, to help them select appropriate hymns and prayers to be used during the various services, to plan their own participation in those services, if they wish to do so and in a way that is line with the guidelines he is bound to follow, and to learn more about the life of the person who has passed away so that these ideas may be incorporated into the homily he will give during the Funeral, or Requiem, Mass itself. While the Funeral Director with whom the family are working will take care of many of the practical details, the Parish Priest will arrange details at the church itself.

The Various Stages of a Catholic Funeral

THE FUNERAL MASS is normally the heart of a Catholic funeral but the rites can unfold in stages, as you wish.

In the Days Preceding

It is now much less often the case, as you know, but some families desire to bring the body of the deceased to the family home for some time before the funeral. If they do, please contact the Parish Priest to let him know. He may wish to come to the home to recite the rosary or otherwise pray with them. Different parishes have different customs and the Parish Priest needs to be consulted beforehand. In some places, for instance, it is the custom for the parish deacon, parish sister, or a member of a parish organisation to attend rather than the Parish Priest.

The Evening Before and on the Day

Oftentimes, the funeral rites begin with a Vigil on the night before the Requiem Mass. During this brief service, the remains of the deceased are welcomed into the church. At its conclusion, there might be the opportunity for those present to go to Confession in preparation for the next day's Eucharist, although this is at the discretion of the Parish Priest and subject to his availability. This Vigil service might be presided over by a parish sister or deacon.

Not all families desire to bring the body of their loved one to the church the evening before the funeral but prefer to have the reception of the body just before the funeral Mass itself. This is perfectly acceptable. Similarly, the Parish Priest may not be available the evening before. In some very busy parishes, where there are numerous funerals, it may not always be possible to arrange the Vigil the evening before the Mass. Please check with the Parish Priest before arranging this part of the funeral rites.

The day after the reception, or immediately after the reception should it precede the Mass, the funeral rites continue with the Mass itself and then conclude either with a brief service at the graveside or at a crematorium.

Should the family opt for cremation rather than burial, it is nonetheless Catholic custom that the remains be buried or otherwise entombed. The presence of our loved one's remains in a cemetery keeps them more firmly in our minds and the burial of remains, rather than their division and scattering, is a more powerful reminder of the resurrection of our bodies in which we hope.

Blessed Happy are those who
mourn for they shall be comforted.
Matthew 5:4

How We Understand Death and Our Funeral Rites

PRAYER FOR THE DEAD plays a central role in our funeral rites. In this, our Catholic tradition differs from other Christian bodies in Scotland and, of course, very markedly from services presided over by Humanist officiants. Some families, having been to those services but not to a Catholic one, can find the differences quite remarkable.

Jesus Christ is the same yesterday
and today and for ever. Hebrews 13:8

Hopeful Prayer for Consolation and Resurrection

As Catholics we have the Risen Lord as the centre of our funeral liturgy. Jesus—and the deceased's sharing in His resurrection—is the principle focus of what is to take place. The contrast with other funerals is that those rites tend to spend the bulk of the service remembering the person who has passed away. We remember as well, but we also acknowledge grief and loss in our prayers and hope for resurrection. This difference, spending less time on the past and more on the present and future, is sometimes not only obvious but even a bit startling to people who expect one thing and experience another.

Do you not know that all of us who have been baptised into Christ Jesus were baptised into his death? Therefore we have been buried with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. Romans 6:3-5

Baptism and Its Symbols

Baptism which, according to Christian thought, is one's original sharing in the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus, figures prominently in Catholic funeral rites, with holy water and other symbols of baptism playing a prominent part in a funeral. The liturgy revolves around the Risen Lord, present among us, who reminds us that through death we share resurrection, that in the midst of pain we have consolation and, in mourning, joy is possible. Through our memories, our faith, our hope and our charity, good may come of events that we find so painful now.

How Families Might Participate

THE FAMILY are encouraged to take a full part in the Funeral Mass in the way that they would normally in any ordinary celebration of Mass, by listening and responding to the prayers, the scriptures and words of encouragement by the priest, and to sing and pray at the appropriate times. There are many other ways in which the family may participate in all of the rites. The Parish Priest will lead the family through them to help them better understand how they might take part.

Speaking During the Funeral Rites

THE FAMILY ARE INVITED to share some words of welcome, or in appreciation of the support of those who have attended, or some words of remembrance about the deceased. However, eulogies, properly speaking—when one or more family members or friends, speaks during the service itself, sharing memories, anecdotes, or readings of various types—with which people might be familiar from memorial

services they may have attended are not allowed at Catholic funerals. However, we recognise that those in attendance might well feel a strong need to be part of the funeral rites in a way that goes beyond doing readings, making responses and such, so we try to suggest some options.

Options

While not taking away the right and responsibility of a particular Parish Priest to order things in his parish, it is possible for someone to speak at the Vigil (the reception of remains on the evening before), before the beginning of Mass, at the crematorium or graveside, or at the gathering of the family subsequently for hospitality.

Speaking before the beginning of Mass offers a friend or family member the opportunity to welcome those who have come, to invite those in attendance to join together in music and prayer, and, by speaking some words of appreciation of the one who has passed away, to set the tone for what follows in the Mass itself.

However, the last option listed above, speaking at the gathering for hospitality, also offers a fine, indeed probably the best, opportunity for people to share their thoughts and memories about the deceased in a more relaxed setting.

Another Possibility

Another option might be for the family to write out what they would like to say and to print it in the order of service which is often used at funerals. In this way, those in attendance will be able to take it home with them and reflect on it, and the person whom they remember, in the future. This would be facilitated by the Funeral Director since, ordinarily, they are charged with preparing the order of service.

Consulting with Your Priest

The intense emotions of the day may make it inadvisable to maintain one's composure to read the Scriptures at Mass, and even more so to offer appropriate personal thoughts at any point in the course of the funeral liturgies. If, nonetheless, it is the intention of a family member or close friend to speak at one of the points noted above, please let them know that they must discuss this with the priest celebrating the funeral, that he will need to see the text they intend to use and agree its suitability. As a tip, a sheet of A4 takes about five minutes to read. That is a good period of time.

Choosing Appropriate Music

Music other than hymns, prayers other than those from the funeral rites and readings other than those from Scriptures are best kept for a different time and

place when people can enjoy them in a more relaxed setting and reminisce together on their importance to the person who has passed away. *Please note that, due to strictly enforced copyright regulations, secular music may not be played in the church.*

Other Issues

AT THE REQUEST OF THE FAMILY there may be the opportunity in a retiring collection, to make a donation to a place (hospice) or a cause (organ donation or cancer research) which has been a support to the deceased or their family. Again, speak to the priest in order to see if he is willing for this to go ahead and to see how it might be arranged.

As with all services in a Catholic Church there is no charge or set fee. However, as the priest depends on the generosity of the parishioners for his income, an appropriate donation to the priest and/or the parish will be gratefully received. The same is true for organists or singers who accompany the service. Once again, the priest may suggest customary amounts but it will also be helpful for the Funeral Director to point this out to the family.

Sometimes it is the case that the person who has passed away, or their family, may no longer be practising their Catholic Faith but still desire the attendance of a priest and a Catholic funeral of some sort. They might hesitate to approach the priest to ask him if a service at the crematorium, graveside or funeral home might be appropriate. If that is the case, please let them know that the Parish Priest would be happy to help them.

Final Words

Finally, the Church, through the Parish Priests and parishes with which you work, wishes to thank you for the work you do with families in difficult times. If you have any questions about anything you've read here, or regarding any aspect of Catholic funeral rites, please do not hesitate to call.

Jesus Christ is the same
yesterday and today and for
ever. Hebrews 13:8

