

Funeral Preparations

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When a death occurs, a number of events, both practical and spiritual, follow. Planning some of the liturgical details in advance can be a gift to the bereaved.

A Catholic funeral is prayer. Let your parish staff help in the beforehand preparations. They can be an asset with decisions on scriptures, music, and musicians.

The Rite of Christian Burial is one liturgy with three distinctive rituals: the vigil, funeral Mass, and burial. The vigil and Mass take place at the church, as it is the primary location where the faithful encounter God's grace. Funeral homes will offer their chapels, but our parishes are our spiritual homes.

The vigil is structured as a Liturgy of the Word. The community gathers to hear good news in the midst of death's sadness. The service is ecumenical, with all able to participate in praying the psalms, scriptures, and intercessions. Some communities have the custom of praying the Rosary. If this worthy prayer is included, it should not replace the vigil service.

For the funeral Mass, the family can choose readings from the Lectionary options for the dead. The funeral liturgy prays for

the soul of the deceased and seeks to minister to the grieving. Family or friends can serve in ministerial capacities of lector, altar server, or extraordinary minister of Holy Communion, though they should not feel obligated to fill these roles. Parishes will welcome those who offer their talents and provide ministers when there is need.

Unlike the readings, there is no set music repertoire for funerals. Consider music that is sung regularly on Sunday. Every week we celebrate Christ's death and triumph into new life. Using familiar songs, hymns, and chants will aid the assembly in participating and offering their voice to the ritual. Voice your music preferences, while allowing your local parish musician to guide you. Musical abilities and repertoire vary among parishes.

Finally, let the liturgy be primary. The prayers, the scriptures, and the psalms cover the range of emotions that accompany death. Ultimately, the liturgy unites us with Christ Jesus, who suffered death and rose from it, making it holy and glorious for all who follow him.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

- What is your attitude toward death?
- Tell about your first memory of death.
- Think over your most positive experience of death.

HOME ACTIVITIES

Share with your family your favorite liturgical song or hymn. Why is it touching?

Discuss where your memorials should be directed. Will they go to the parish, a Catholic grade school, high school, university, or the missions? **R**

SCRIPTURE CORNER

Romans 6:3–9

1 Thessalonians 4:13–18

1 John 3:1–2

John 11:21–27 or John 14:1–6

What do these scriptures tell us about the Christian understanding of death?

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