

The Importance of Planning



Catholic Funerals for families

Diocese of Prince Albert
Liturgy Office



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Death: Its significance

The death of one who is close to us is a difficult moment in the life of a family, and perhaps also for the community. It involves a sense of loss since those with whom we have shared life are no longer with us. In the light of Christian faith, however, the true significance of death is revealed. Its true meaning gives hope.

Death, for a Christian, is the gateway to eternal life in Christ. As St. Paul reminds us, even though we mourn, we are given hope and comfort in the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. (cf. 1 Thessalonians 4:13–17.)



The Role of the Church

The pastoral ministry of the Church and its funeral rites is directed to placing the event of death in the context of our Christian faith. The funeral liturgy is a privileged moment for the family and believing community to offer worship, praise and thanks to God for the gift of the deceased, to commend the departed to the mercy of God, and to offer to the grieving the consolation that comes from the Word of God and celebration of Christ's saving sacrifice in the sacrament of the Eucharist.

“Members of the community should console the mourners with words of faith and support and with acts of kindness, for example, assisting them with some of the routine tasks of daily living. Such assistance may allow members of the family to devote time to planning the funeral rites with the priest and other ministers and may also give the family time for prayer and mutual comfort.” (#10 Order of Christian Funerals)

1. Vigil for the Deceased

The Church provides rites for use during the period between the time of death and the funeral Mass. In this way, the Church prayerfully accompanies the family through the initial time of adjustment following the death of a loved one, helping them to draw comfort and hope from Christian faith. These prayers normally take place at either the parish church or the funeral home, in the presence of family, friends and members of the parish community.

2. Funeral Liturgy

When one of its own dies, the Church earnestly desires that the family and friends of the deceased gather with members of the parish community for the celebration of the funeral Mass. This takes place in the parish church. We are strengthened by the scriptural proclamation of the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and by the Eucharistic presence of our Lord, whose own pass-over from death to life gives hope to all who die believing in Him.

3. The Rite of Committal

The funeral rites conclude with the rite of committal, celebrated at the place of interment. The family and other members of the Church prayerfully offer their final act of respect toward the loved one's body, which will be raised up on the last day in accordance with the promise of Christ.



Guidelines for the Celebration of the Funeral Liturgy

Over the years, especially as society has become more secularized, different practices have emerged which sometimes obscure or even take the place of the Christian perspective on death. For this reason it is necessary to have certain guidelines, which preserve and emphasize the Christian character of the funeral rites, and thus serve to give real consolation and hope to our people when a loved one dies.

It is very helpful for family members to meet with the parish priest as soon as possible after the death of a loved one in order to plan the funeral celebration in accordance with Diocesan policy. The priest is ready to meet and support the family by offering the consolation that comes from faith and expressing the care and concern of the entire parish community.



The Place of the Funeral

The proper place for the funeral liturgy is in the church of the parish community to which the deceased belonged. Normally, this should be a funeral Mass. For pastoral reasons, the parish priest may determine that a funeral liturgy without the celebration of Mass is appropriate. This, too, is most properly celebrated in the parish church. In exceptional circumstances, and at the sole discretion of the parish priest, a funeral liturgy without Mass may be celebrated in the funeral home. When this occurs, the official rites of the Church are to be used.

Symbols of Our Faith



During the funeral liturgy one sees simple yet powerful symbols that reflect our hope in the resurrection. The paschal candle is lit to show that Christ is the light that dispels the darkness of sin and death; holy water is sprinkled to recall the new life of baptism; and the casket is covered with a white pall, which symbolizes the Christian dignity of all the baptized. When the body is brought to the church, any symbols that may have adorned the coffin, such as national flags or insignia of associations to which the deceased belonged, are removed in favour of the pall.

In this way the unsurpassable dignity given in baptism and the fundamental equality of all before God is symbolized.

Insignia and other items, such as pictures, are most appropriately displayed at the funeral home during the visitation or in the parish centre during the reception following the Mass. With the permission of the parish priest, they may also be displayed in a suitable place in the church, but never in such a way as to take away from the primary symbolism of pall and paschal candle, used to highlight the baptismal dignity of the deceased, a status that surpasses all earthly achievement or association.

Funeral Masses on Sunday

On the first day of the week, the day of the Lord Jesus, God our Father assembles His people to sing His praises. Sunday has a unique place in Christian worship. It is a day for the whole community to gather to celebrate the Eucharist in communion with the universal Church. Mass on this day is to be celebrated in accordance with the readings and prayers set forth by the Church in the liturgical calendar. For this reason, it is not a day for particular celebrations such as funeral Masses.

In Canada funeral Masses may be celebrated any day **other than** Sundays, Christmas Day, New Year's Day, Holy Thursday, and during the Easter Triduum (from the Mass of the Lord's Supper to Easter Sunday inclusively).

Scripture Readings

The readings for the Mass are always taken from the Sacred Scriptures.

The Word of God announces Christian faith in the risen life: that we must face death, that Christ has conquered death, and that his victory can become ours.

Lectionary
for Funeral
Mass



Booklet
to help
families
choose
readings



Only passages from the Sacred Scriptures may be read during the funeral liturgy. If they are desired, all poetry, devotional or philosophical readings may be read either at the funeral home vigil service, following the committal service at the cemetery or during the reception following the liturgy.

Eulogies at Funerals

In our Catholic beliefs, we understand death as leaving this life to enter into the NEW LIFE of eternal union with God. At the Funeral Mass of our loved one, our attention is centered on Jesus, who speaks to us through the Scriptures and who comes to us in the Holy Eucharist in our time of grief. The nature and purpose of a Funeral Mass is to focus on the promise of eternal life, the eventual hope of reunion, the merciful love of Christ and the victory over death won by Jesus. We pray that the merits of that victory be extended to the person for whom we pray now. The Mass commends our loved one to God's merciful love and pleads for the forgiveness of his/her sins.

In the last 30 years or so, having a eulogy (words of praise) or words of remembrance of our deceased loved one has become a meaningful custom. In Baptism, we were given the flame of faith. In our Catholic eulogy, we wish to witness to how our loved one carried that flickering flame of faith, nurtured it and shared it. Our Diocesan Church recommends a brief (3-8 minutes) eulogy and this is properly done at the Vigil Prayer Service the evening before the Funeral Mass or at the reception lunch after the Funeral Mass or it is given before the Funeral Mass begins. These may be good moments when a number of persons may wish to speak and share their memories. Sharing can also take place during the period of visitation at the funeral home or at the cemetery. This brief eulogy should be written and presented to the presiding priest or deacon at least 24 hours in advance of its delivery. This permits good exchange of information about the deceased and possible editing.

In the Christian funeral, we gather not to praise the deceased but to pray for them.



The eulogy should concentrate upon the life of the loved one highlighting his/her faith journey, his/her virtues and qualities. It should express the family's and friends' affection and care. Good taste and good humour are appropriate. The challenge is to keep it brief, to the point, well balanced and pastoral. The lengthy, elaborate, entertaining, power-point eulogies come across as the centrepiece of the ceremony, overshadowing and overwhelming everything else that the Funeral Mass stands for and seeks to teach. For this reason, they are rightfully placed at the Vigil Prayers the evening before the Funeral Mass or at the reception lunch after the Funeral Mass. These may be good moments when a number of persons may wish to speak and share their memories.

Words of remembrance with clear guidelines using appropriate choices and good judgment can enrich the quality of farewell, the solidarity of faith and lead hearts to a deeper appreciation of the liturgy of the Funeral Celebration for our loved one.

Music

Music has a powerful and healing effect on us during the liturgy. If the funeral is taking place within a specific liturgical season (Advent, Lent, Christmas, Easter) it will be most appropriate to have hymns that reflect this, in order to connect the death of the deceased with the rhythm of the Church's liturgical year. All music in the church must be liturgical in nature. Secular or recorded music is not appropriate in church. The choice of hymns is to be made in dialogue with the presiding priest and the music ministers of the parish.



Cremation

Even though the Church retains its preference for the burial of the body, after the example of Christ's own burial, permission has been granted for Catholics to be cremated. According to a document published called 'Catholics and Cremation' by the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops it states: "The funeral liturgy, including the Eucharist, may be celebrated with the cremated remains of the deceased person present. There are some conditions, namely, that the cremation was not inspired by motives contrary to Christian teaching.

The cremated remains are put into a dignified container that shows reverence toward the person's remains. The container is then placed on a small table provided for this purpose. The liturgy will conclude with the final commendation. Signs of reverence toward the body, such as the sprinkling with holy water and the use of incense, may be used. The interment of the remains may then follow the liturgy or take place at another appropriate time." Scattering the ashes is not a lawful act of respect for the deceased.

A specific place for a person's remains helps focus the remembering and prayer for the deceased person by the family and friends, and by the Church in general.



The above document that was mentioned concludes by stating: "Families are encouraged to approach their pastor or a pastoral minister regarding arrangements for funeral services before they make plans with the funeral home. This is even more necessary when cremation is chosen. Funeral liturgies are for the living and are a vital part of the grieving and healing process."

*Funeral liturgies give families
and friends a formal way of
remembering and saying
goodbye.*

For Further Information:

Please do not hesitate to contact your parish priest if you have any further questions.

Contact information for all parishes in the Catholic Diocese of Prince Albert can be found at

www.padiocese.ca