

➤ *What We Believe as Catholics*

If you have ever wondered why Catholics have certain rituals and practices at the time of death, then you are not alone. Our faith in the Paschal Mystery (the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ) reveals itself through the dying and death of each Christian. The following points are designed to invite reflection upon the meaning of what we do and believe at the time of a Christian's death. We also hope that this information will guide you to a better understanding and appreciation of our beliefs and practices.

In facing death, we are reminded that God has created each person for eternal life. We celebrate the funeral rites to offer worship, praise and thanksgiving to God for the gift of a person's life, which has now been returned to the Author of Life. At the death of a Christian, the Church intercedes on behalf of the deceased. We are confident in the conviction that death is not the end, nor does it break the bonds of family, friendship and community that are forged in life.

The Church through its funeral rites commends the dead to God's merciful love and pleads for the forgiveness of his or her sins. The celebration of the Christian funeral brings hope and consolation to the living. In the Eucharistic sacrifice, the Church celebrates Christ's Passover from death to life and our participation in this great mystery. The faith of all the baptized is renewed and nourished in this celebration. The intimate connection between the baptism of the Christian into the death and resurrection of Christ and the Eucharistic celebration is one of the main reasons for offering the Mass for the deceased.

In summary, we believe that in celebrating the funeral rites, we affirm and express the union of the Church on earth with the Church in heaven in the one great communion of saints. Though separated from the living, the dead are still at one with the community of believers on earth and benefit from their prayers and intercession. In the gathering of the community of believers with the community of saints in heaven, we offer our prayers through the person of Jesus Christ in the greatest prayer of the Church, which is the Eucharist.

➤ *The Three Stations of the Rite*

When a member of the faithful has died the Church identifies three stations, or time periods, for the celebration of the rite of Christian burial:

I. THE VIGIL SERVICE

The Vigil for the deceased, commonly known as the Wake, is the initial rite celebrated by the Christian community at the time following death and before the funeral liturgy and the rite of committal. The Vigil usually takes place in a funeral home. It may also take place in the family home or in the parish church, as local custom dictates. The celebration of the Vigil is the time for the Christian community to offer both prayer and consolation to the members of the bereaved family; to read and reflect on the Word of God; to call upon our God of Mercy through intercessory prayer; and to provide an opportunity for family and friends to recall the memory of their loved one. Other prayers, such as the Rosary, are also encouraged since they help us to reflect upon the Paschal Mystery and so lead us to a greater sense of hope at this time of grief.

II. The Mass of Christian Burial

For Catholics the celebration of the Mass is both the source and the summit of our faith. Hence, when we celebrate the Mass at the time of death it is seen as the fullest expression of our faith in God's abundant mercy, our hope in the resurrection of the dead, and the love that God has for us, which is not extinguished even by death.

As an expression of our faith in Jesus Christ we actively participate in the Funeral Mass. Family members may choose the Scripture reading for the Mass, cover the casket with the pall, place Christian symbols on the casket (crucifix, bible), present the bread and wine at the preparation rite, and help select hymns for the community to sing.

Members of the parish community also participate in the funeral liturgy and join with the bereaved family in the celebration of the funeral rites by proclaiming the Word, leading the faithful in song, serving at the altar and if needed, helping with the distribution of communion.

A priest or deacon preaches at the Funeral Mass. By preaching on Jesus Christ, who conquered death by His victory on the cross, our faith offers consolation to the family in their loss and challenges the community to live more faithful lives.

A eulogy differs from a homily and consists of a reflection on the life of the deceased and how this person touched the lives of others. Sharing memories with Christian charity, good discretion, and warm humor are appropriate elements for a eulogy. Eulogies are encouraged to be shared at the Vigil. However, if the parish priest agrees, a family member or friend may share one brief written eulogy not more than five minutes after the communion rite at Mass.

III. The Rite of Committal

The Rite of Committal is celebrated at the place of burial. In the committal of the body to its place of rest, we express our hope that the deceased will experience the glory of the resurrection. The committal must always be celebrated immediately following the funeral, unless a good pastoral reason dictates otherwise, such as travel to a distant cemetery. In the case of cremation, the cremated remains of the deceased must always be immediately interred in a consecrated burial site.

➤ FAQ for Funerals

What do I do when a loved one is sick and is dying?

- Contact the office of the loved one's parish church and ask to speak to a priest.
- If you use Hospice they will often contact the parish and request the sacraments for the sick and dying.
- Don't wait until death is imminent before contacting the parish priest. Parish priests are most interested in being there for a family in the time of final illness, death and grief.

What do I do when a loved one dies?

- Contact a local funeral home of your choice. The funeral home will establish initial contact with the parish church.
- The priest will assist a family in making appropriate liturgical arrangements such as scripture readings and musical selections.

What is the proper rite of Christian burial?

- Viewing at the funeral home or parish church
- Mass of Christian Burial at the deceased's parish church
- Committal services at the cemetery (For Catholics, burial in the sacred ground of a Catholic cemetery is the preferred place of burial.)

Who can receive the Rite of Christian Burial?

Catholics may receive the rites of Christian burial within the celebration of Mass. Members of other Christian faith traditions usually receive the funeral rites of their own Church; however, they may also receive the rite of Christian burial in the Catholic Church but outside of the Mass. A Christian burial service, commendation, and committal at the graveside may be offered for them.

What are the options for a viewing?

You can schedule a viewing the evening before the burial and/or before the Mass of Christian Burial. The viewing is usually held in a funeral home, however, the parish may authorize a viewing in the parish church.

Why have a viewing?

It provides a sense of closure and allows family members who were not present at the time of death a time to express their last farewell. It also allows extended family and friends an opportunity to express their support and condolences.

What about a eulogy for the deceased?

- **Below are the diocesan liturgical guidelines for eulogies:**

In the Diocese of Wilmington, it is recommended that the Vigil (Wake) is the most appropriate time for members of the family and friends to share memories of the deceased or to pay tribute to the deceased through vocal remembrances, photographs, favorite songs, etc.

The reception after the burial is another appropriate time for the remembrances because there is less of an emotional burden and the context is looking toward the future in a more positive manner.

If a family member wishes to express appreciation or say something in remembrance at Mass, the following are to be observed: Only one family member or friend is to speak. The words to be shared must be in writing and approved in advance by the celebrant. Because of the intensity of emotions at the time of a funeral, the person who will speak is to be brief, that is, no more than five minutes. This faith-remembrance is to take place after the Prayer after Communion or prior to the Collect. Because this is not part of the Liturgy of the Word, this remembrance is not to take place at the ambo, but at another appropriate place of the celebrant's choosing.

My deceased family member was not an actively practicing Catholic, can we still have a Mass of Christian burial?

Yes, the Church encourages active and inactive Catholics to take full advantage of the rite of Christian burial.

Is cremation allowed in the Catholic Church?

Yes. Although the Church now permits cremation, burial of the body is still preferred. The physical presence of the body reflects the values affirmed in these rites. After the final commendation at the end of the Mass of Christian Burial, the body is transported to the crematorium for cremation. Through a dispensation granted by the Church, cremated remains may also be present in church for the Mass of Christian Burial, provided that the motives for cremation are not contrary to Church teaching. The priest arranging Mass must be informed of the family's request to allow the cremated remains to be present in order to obtain the permission that is required. Typically, having the cremated remains present for Mass is an exception to be made on an individual basis and is not considered the norm. Cremated human remains are always to be treated with respect and placed in a worthy vessel. Once burial rites have been held and the cremation has occurred, the cremated remains are to be brought to the cemetery for final disposition. Scattering cremated remains or keeping them at home is not the reverent disposition that the Church requires.

➤ *Signs and Symbols of the Funeral*

The Catholic Funeral Mass emphasizes our faith in Jesus' victory over death and our hope in resurrection, even as we mourn our temporary separation from a loved one. We believe that death is not the end, but the beginning of a perfect, permanent life with Christ in heaven. Through the many ceremonies and symbols that are part of our faith, we find hope in the midst of our tears. To help make the funeral liturgy more consoling and understandable, we have provided some explanations of these parts of the liturgy.

- **Symbols of Christian Life** – A symbol of Christian life, such as a bible, a book of the gospels, or a cross may be placed on the coffin as a sign that the Christian is marked, in Baptism, and through Jesus' victory over death is brought to eternal life.
- **Sprinkling of the Casket with Holy Water** – We share in the Lord's death and resurrection through the waters of our baptism. The same cleansing waters of baptism, that made us sons and daughters of God and filled us with the Holy Spirit, are sprinkled over the deceased to remind us of the grace and hope that we have in Christ Jesus our Lord and God's power of our mortal and flawed nature.
- **Placing of the Pall** – The funeral pall points back to the white garment given to us at our Baptism and symbolizes our life in Christ. It is draped over the coffin at the beginning of the liturgy, usually by family members.
- **The Easter or Paschal Candle** – The Easter candle is lit to symbolize the light of the risen Christ and our belief that He has conquered the darkness of sin and death. This candle stands in the sanctuary space to greet the body and to remind us that our loved one, through his or her death, shares in the victory of Jesus over these powers of darkness.
- **Incense and the Final Commendation** – The last ceremony at the Funeral Mass is a rite of final farewell or commendation. During this, the Priest or Deacon offers prayer for the deceased and those who mourn, for the deceased that he may be granted entrance into paradise and for the mourners that they be granted comfort. Oftentimes, incense is used during this rite as a sign of our prayers rising up to God the most High.

➤ Scripture Readings for the Funeral Mass

- The readings from the Sacred Scriptures proclaim the Paschal Mystery, teach remembrance of the dead, convey the hope of being gathered together again in God's kingdom, and encourage the witness of Christian life. The readings tell of God's design for a world in which suffering and death will relinquish their hold on all whom God has called his own. Usually, there are three readings during the Funeral Mass.

Old Testament

1	2 Maccabees 12:43-46	He acted in a noble and excellent way as he had the resurrection of the dead in view.
2	Job 19:1, 23-27	I know that my Vindicator lives.
3	Long Form Wisdom 3:1-9 Short Form Wisdom 3:1-6,9	As sacrificial offerings, he took them to himself.
4	Wisdom 4:7-15	An unsullied life, the attainment of old age.
5	Isaiah 25:6a,7-9	He will destroy death forever.
6	Lamentations 3:17-26	It is good to hope in silence for the saving help of the Lord.
7	Daniel 12:1-3	Many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake.

New Testament

1	Romans 5:5-11	Since we are now justified by his Blood, we will be saved through him from the wrath.
2	Romans 5:17-21	Where sin increased, grace overflowed all the more.
3	Romans 6:3-9	We too might live in newness of life.
	Romans 6:3-4, 8-9	
4	Romans 8:14-23	We also groan within ourselves as we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies.
5	Romans 8:31b-35,37-39	What will separate us from the love of Christ?
6	Romans 14:7-9,10c-12	Whether we live or die, we are the Lord's.
7	1 Corinthians 15:20-28	So too in Christ shall all be brought to life.
	1 Corinthians 15:20-23	
8	1 Corinthians 15:51-57	Death is swallowed up in victory.
9	2 Corinthians 4:14-5:1	What is seen is transitory, but what is unseen is eternal.
10	2 Corinthians 5:1,6-10	We have a building from God, eternal in heaven.
11	Philippians 3:20-21	He will change our lowly bodies to conform to his glory.
12	1 Thessalonians 4:13-18	Thus we shall always be with the Lord.
13	2 Timothy 2:8-13	If we have died with him we shall also live with him.
14	1 John 3:1-2	We shall see him as he is.
15	1 John 3:14-16	We know that we have passed from death to life because we love our brothers.
16	Acts 10:34-43	He is the one appointed by God as judge of the living and the dead.
	Acts 10:34-36,42-43	
17*	Revelation 14:13	Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord.
18*	Revelation 20:11-21:1	The dead were judged according to their deeds.
19*	Revelation 21:1-5a, 6b-7	There shall be no more death.

* options for first reading only during the Easter Season

Gospel

1	Matthew 5:1-12a	Rejoice and be glad, for your reward will be great in heaven.
2	Matthew 11:25-30	Come to me and I will give you rest.
3	Matthew 25:1-13	Behold, the bridegroom! Come out to him!
4	Matthew 25:31-46	Come, you who are blessed by my Father.
5	Long Form Mark 15:33-39;16:1-6 Short Form Mark 15:33-39	Jesus gave a loud cry and breathed his last.
6	Luke 7:11-17	Young man, I tell you, arise!
7	Luke 12:35-40	You also must be prepared.
8	Luke 23:33,39-43	Today you will be with me in Paradise.
9	Long Form Luke 23:44-46,50,52-53;24:1-6a Short Form Luke 23:44-46,50,52-53	Father, into your hands I commend my spirit.
10	Long Form Luke 24:13-35 Short Form Luke 24:13-16,28-35	Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?
11	John 5:24-29	Whoever hears my word and believes has passed from death to life.
12	John 6:37-40	Everyone who sees the Son and believes in him may have eternal life and I shall raise him on the last day.
13	John 6:51-59	Whoever eats this bread will live forever, and I will raise them up on the last day.
14	Long Form John 11:17-27 Short Form John 11:21-27	I am the resurrection and the life.
15	John 11:32-45	Lazarus, come out!
16	Long Form John 12:23-28 Short Form John 12:23-26	If it dies, it produces much fruit.
17	John 14:1-6	In my Father's house, there are many dwellings.
18	John 17:24-26	I wish that where I am they also may be with me.
19	John 19:17-18,25-39	And bowing his head he handed over his Spirit.