

# FUNERAL RITES OF THE CHURCH

## 1. Vigil Service

At the Vigil Service, usually conducted in the funeral home on the eve of the Funeral Mass, the faithful keep watch with the family in prayer to the God of mercy and find strength in Christ's presence. The Vigil is a Scripture or Evening Prayer Service (Liturgy of the Hours, Office of the Dead). The Rosary, or part of the Rosary, may be prayed as well, but not as a replacement of the Vigil.

## 2. Funeral Mass

The tradition of the Church has always been the celebration of the Mass with the body present. Christians respect and honor the body of the dead, which in Baptism became the Temple of the Holy Spirit. The Funeral Mass includes the reception of the body, the Liturgy of the Word, the Liturgy of the Eucharist, and the Final Commendation and Farewell. We are reminded of Christ's own words, "Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood shall live forever" (Jn. 6:55).

## 3. Rite of Committal

For the final disposition of the body, it is the ancient Christian custom to bury or entomb the bodies of the dead in a cemetery, which means a "resting place". The Rite of Committal is the conclusion of the funeral rites, and may be celebrated beside the open grave or place of interment. The faithful express the hope that, with all those who have gone before marked with the sign of faith, the deceased awaits the glory of the resurrection and passes into the welcoming company of those who see God face to face.

## Cremation

Because of the sacred tradition of awaiting the resurrection of the body, the Church does not encourage, but allows cremation. Cremation is not to be seen as the norm. If cremation is chosen, the Funeral Mass with the body present should precede cremation.

*"When the choice has been made to cremate a body, it is recommended that the cremation take place after the Funeral Liturgy" (OCF, #418).*

However, when circumstances prevent the presence of the body at the Funeral Mass, it is appropriate that the urn containing the cremated remains of the body be present for the funeral rites, including the Vigil for the Deceased, The Funeral Mass, and the Rite of Committal.

The Funeral Mass is always celebrated in a church. The cremated remains should then be reverently buried or entombed in a cemetery or columbarium, not scattered.

If a sea burial is requested for the cremated remains, they are to be placed in the ocean in an appropriate container and not scattered across the water.

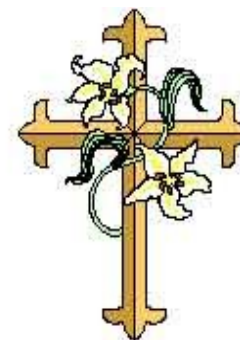
*"The cremated remains of a body should be treated with the same respect given to the human body from which they come" (OCF, #417).*

## Alkaline Hydrolysis

The Catholic Church does not condone or approve of the use of Alkaline Hydrolysis. *"The Church's reverence for the sacredness of the human body grows out of reverence and concern both natural and supernatural for the human person" (OCF, 412).*

The two common methods used are Aquamation and Dissolution. The human body is dissolved in liquid and disposed of (either as fertilizer or refuse). Both methods disregard the respect due the human person.

# GUIDELINES FOR CATHOLIC FUNERALS



## Diocese of Palm Beach

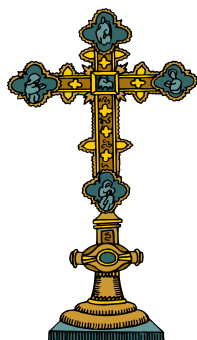
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In him the hope of blessed resurrection has dawned, that those saddened by the certainty of dying might be consoled by the promise of immortality to come. Indeed for your faithful, Lord, life is changed not ended, and, when this earthly dwelling turns to dust, an eternal dwelling is made ready for them in heaven (*Roman Missal*).



The clergy or pastoral ministers of the parish must be consulted before any liturgical arrangements are made with the funeral director. This provides the opportunity to have a clear understanding of the meaning and significance of the rites as well as for family members to participate in the rites themselves.



## **Readings**

Family members are encouraged to look over a set of readings (provided by the funeral director or the priest or deacon) to make suitable choices for the funeral liturgy. Family members or friends may be chosen to read the selections at the Wake Service and/or Funeral Mass. The reader chosen should be a Catholic familiar with the liturgy. (*Through Death to Life*, Ave Maria Press, is an excellent guide for priests and funeral directors).

## **Music**

Family members should speak with the priest, deacon and/or music director at the parish to discuss appropriate music for the Funeral Mass.

The Funeral Mass is a sacred moment to honor, remember and pray for the deceased. Secular music during the liturgy is not appropriate.

At other gatherings of family and friends, (e.g., following the Wake Service, Reception following the Rite of Committal), secular music may be played to remember the deceased.

## **Eulogies**

Again, in keeping with the sacred nature of the Funeral Liturgy, it is not recommended that eulogies take place during the Mass.

Given the secular nature of many of the stories shared during eulogies, the setting of the Mass is not the recommended or appropriate place.

Eulogies are recommended at the Wake Service, the Rite of Committal and the Reception or Gathering of family and friends following the Rite of Committal.

The pastor may however permit some brief remarks following the Prayer after Communion (OCF #170).

## **Memorial Masses**

Given the transient nature of modern society, it is often difficult to assemble all of the family and friends of the deceased in a timely manner. The custom has arisen by which a private and simple burial precedes a formal gathering of family and friends at a Memorial Mass to remember the deceased. If a Memorial Mass is celebrated, the same care and diligence in the selection of music and readings should be practiced to maintain the sacredness of the Mass. Please discuss the restrictions in the Church's Liturgical Calendar with the priest before planning a Memorial Mass.

## **Mass Intentions**

Our Catholic tradition offers the opportunity to have multiple Masses offered for the soul of the deceased loved one. Please contact your local parish to have Mass offered on birthdays, anniversaries, etc. of your beloved deceased.

## **From Holy Scripture**

"... for if he were not expecting the fallen to rise again, it would have been superfluous and foolish to pray for the dead. But if he did this with a view to the splendid reward that awaits those who had gone to rest in godliness, it was a holy and pious thought. Thus he made atonement for the dead that they might be absolved from their sins" (2 Macc. 12:44-46).

**The Mass, the memorial of Christ's death and resurrection, is the principal and most appropriate celebration of the Christian funeral**