

Funerals at Holy Trinity Parish

The death of one of our sisters and brothers is a significant event for us as Church. It is a time when we, who loved the deceased person, mourn our loss. It is a time when we as the Church celebrate God's gift of life and mark, with special rites and gatherings, the return of that life to our loving God. It is a time when the Church earnestly seeks to minister not only to the deceased but the living as well.

The rites of the Order of Christian Funerals are rites of the living. It is how the Church walks with those who mourn. The following is shared to assist ministers and faithful alike with some aspects of the Order of Christian Funerals. It is not intended that it be comprehensive but focus upon particular aspects with which some may not be familiar.

It is hoped that this pamphlet can assist those who may have to plan such rites and clarify some questions that have arisen since the implementation of the Order of Christian Funerals in 1989. Questions that may remain after reading this should be discussed with the priest or other minister who has experience with the rites.

As Christians we know intellectually that our loved ones are in a better place. Emotionally we feel a tremendous loss and emptiness. The journey of feelings between the head and the heart can be challenging and lonely. The ones left behind discover that their lives have changed too.

GENERAL OVERVIEW

The common celebration of the rites surrounding death takes the form of three liturgical celebrations: a Vigil, the Funeral liturgy, and the Rite of Committal.

The Vigil for the Deceased (Wake) usually takes place the evening before the Funeral liturgy. There are two forms that this vigil may take. A Liturgy of the Word consisting of scripture and song follows the usual order as at Mass. Another option may be to pray the Liturgy of the Hours consisting of the same elements as above but in different form.

Prior to the revision of the funeral rites, the common practice was to gather mourners and well-wishers together at the funeral home the evening prior to the funeral to pray the Rosary. This private devotion was prayed to fill the void where the public liturgy no longer provided a ritual. The reinstatement of the vigil in the funeral rites has replaced the need for other

devotions. The vigil, however, in no way prohibits the praying of the Rosary or other devotions. Many have come to expect such devotions at the time of death. Provision can be made for them to be included within the order of rites. Private devotions, however, must never replace the official liturgy of the Church.

The funeral liturgy usually is within the celebration of the Eucharist (or Mass). In some circumstances, the celebration of the Eucharist may not be possible. When this is the case, a Liturgy of the Word is celebrated with the appropriate rituals of the funeral. Whatever the circumstances, the rituals celebrated at the funeral consist of receiving the body during which it is sprinkled with holy water and covered with the funeral pall. Following Communion, special prayers are added to the liturgy along with the ritual gesture of incensing the body.

The final station of the Order of Christian Funerals is the Rite of Committal which usually takes place at the cemetery. Following the funeral liturgy, the body is taken in procession to the place of interment. Special prayers and readings are celebrated committing the body to the ground and the life of the deceased person to God.

All of these stations and rites may be adapted in light of the circumstances surrounding the death of the person and the situation of the family. Priests and ministers responsible for assisting the families and friends of the deceased are well versed in these adaptations and can assist with planning the rites.

Funerals may be celebrated at any time. Funeral liturgies which include the celebration of the Eucharist, however, may not be celebrated during the Triduum in Holy Week, Easter and its successive Sundays, and Holy Days of Obligation (i.e. Christmas, the Assumption, etc.). A Eucharistic liturgy should take place as soon after one of these days as possible.

MUSIC

Music is an integral part of any liturgical celebration. Music adds to the solemnity of the occasion as well as enhances our participation in the liturgy. Music selected should always be appropriate to the occasion and to the liturgy. Some music is inappropriate for use in the liturgy. Secular music, in particular, is inappropriate within the liturgy because it is not written for that purpose. Such music may hold significant meaning to those who mourn or have been held in particular esteem by the deceased but diverts our attention from the praise of God and the worship we celebrate. Some music may include certain thoughts or statements which are contrary to the beliefs

of the worshipping community and its inclusion in the liturgical celebration may offend that community.

Selection of music should have as its primary motivation praise of God and secondly the enhancement of the liturgy. The advice of our Director of Music Ministries is invaluable in planning the music to be incorporated in the liturgy. Other circumstances also may determine the types of music used, i.e., availability of musicians or the familiarity of the assembly gathered with the music, etc.

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

The Church offers the funeral rites to anyone who seeks them. Christians of other denominations may be afforded the rites of the Church. Catechumens and other non-baptized persons may be buried from the Church. Some circumstances may preclude the celebration of the Eucharist but not the other rites.

Other practices surrounding funerals in our society often are also observed along with the rites of the Church. Civil ceremonies or rituals are the most common rites celebrated along with the Christian. The Church does not seek to demean these secular rites but seeks to insure that the Christian rites and the civil rites not interfere or compete with each other. A common occurrence of this circumstance is the funeral of one who has served in the military. During the funeral liturgy, civil rites and symbols would be inappropriate. The Church asks that the worship of God not be encumbered by anything else. Specifically, the custom of the covering the casket with the U.S. Flag be observed outside of the liturgy. The pall, symbol of the white garment received at baptism, should cover the casket during the liturgy.

CONCLUSION

At the time of death, the Church seeks to comfort and console those who mourn the passing of one who is loved into eternal life. The Church also celebrates the gift of the deceased's life and prays in intercession for her child. It is a time of great emotion and requires that appropriate rites be celebrated. Our culture and society influence many acts of our lives and at times conflict with our beliefs and practices as Catholic Christians. The Church earnestly desires that all understand her rites and seeks to assist all in understanding those conflicts.

The richness of the liturgy provides us with the opportunity to adapt the rites so that they may speak a message of consolation to those who mourn and praise God for the gift of life. It is hoped that the information

provided herein will help those who may find themselves in the position of planning funeral rites.

You are invited to ask additional questions of a priest or other minister in our parish.