

COMFORT AND PEACE

Catholic Funerals
in the
Diocese of
Thunder Bay

"The Lord will be your everlasting light, and your days of sorrows will end." (Isaiah 60:20)

INTRODUCTION

"Blessed are the dead who from now on die in the Lord... they will rest from their labours, for their deeds follow them" (Revelation 14:13).

At the time of the death of one of its members, the Church proclaims with confidence that God has created each person for eternal life, and that Jesus Christ by His death and resurrection has overcome sin and death. The Church prays for the deceased because of its confident belief that death is not the end, and that there is still a bond of community with the living. The Church ministers to the sorrowing and gives consolation in the funeral rites, with the word of God and the sacrament of the Eucharist.

The Church's concern begins in the pastoral care of the dying, offering solace and the hope of Christ to its members. After the passing of a Christian, respect and dignity for the human body remain important, and comfort for the bereaved family and friends may be felt in the ministry of the funeral rites through the Church's ministers and the faithful. The expression of faith in the resurrection pervades all the Church's words and actions at the time of the funeral and related celebrations.

Christians show respect and honour to the bodies of the dead, and the places they rest, since the body was marked with the seal of the Trinity at the time of Baptism and became a temple of the Holy Spirit.

Catholic funeral rites offer praise, worship and thanksgiving to God for the gift of a life which has been returned to God. The Mass, the memorial of Christ's death and resurrection, is the principal celebration of the Christian funeral.

The following notes are intended as a guide to Catholics in considering and planning funerals in a parish of the Diocese of Thunder Bay.

FUNERAL DIRECTORS

Funeral directors have an important role to fulfil in collaboration with clergy, parish volunteers, and family and friends of the deceased in the valued functions of care for the dying, praying for the dead, and comforting those who mourn.

It is good for funeral directors to meet with parishioners to discuss with them the financial and psychological advantages of pre-planned funerals. The funeral director is frequently the first person in communication with a family at the time of a loss of a loved one, and it is important that they collaborate with clergy and parish pastoral teams in order to provide the best care for the bereaved family.

When funeral directors have been contacted by a family to make funeral arrangements, they immediately inform the pastor and let him know the particular circumstances which may be helpful in the ministry to the bereaved. Professional confidentiality is always observed.

The funeral director encourages the family to consult with the pastor if they have not already done so.

PLACE OF THE FUNERAL

The church of the parish community to which the deceased belonged is the appropriate place to celebrate the rites of the funeral and from which the person is buried. As the person was part of a community, it is right for the same community to attend to the deceased and to minister to the family and friends within the person's parish. In exceptional circumstances, other arrangements may be made. The funeral of a deceased non-Catholic may be conducted at a Catholic church, when requested by the relatives.

All baptized Catholics and catechumens may have a Funeral Liturgy in the church, in accord with the Code of Canon Law. Our Liturgy is a prayer for God's mercy for the

deceased and solace for the living and does not presume a life of exemplary faith or virtue.

A Funeral Mass must be celebrated in a church, and a Funeral Liturgy without Mass is properly conducted in the church as well, but the latter may be held in a funeral home. A Funeral Mass is not permitted in a funeral home or mausoleum.

"This is indeed the will of my Father, that all who see the Son and believe in Him may have eternal life, and I will raise them up on the last day." (John 6:40)

FUNERAL RITES OF THE CHURCH

The Catholic "Order of Christian Funerals" provides for three different brief services before the usual liturgies for the dead. These are the "Prayers after Death," a service of "Gathering in the Presence of the Body" and "Transfer of the Body to the Church." These short services of prayer are only occasionally used, at the request of the family or the discretion of the pastor. The order of rites for Catholics usually consists of the **Vigil for the Deceased**, the **Funeral Liturgy**, and the **Committal**. These three are referred to in the sections that follow.

VIGIL FOR THE DECEASED

Sometimes called the "wake service," the Vigil for the Deceased is meant to help the family and friends of the deceased express their sorrow and find strength and consolation through faith in the risen Christ. The Church prays that the person may enjoy eternal life.

The Vigil occurs when the family gathers before the day of the funeral, usually in the presence of the body. Where possible, the Vigil may be conducted in the church where the funeral is to be held, but it is also proper to have the Vigil at a funeral home, or in the home of the deceased.

In the "Order of Christian Funerals" there are eleven different Vigils from which the priest, deacon, or other minister may choose. The person conducting the Vigil will carefully consider which service is most appropriate for the circumstance of the person for whom the prayer is offered. It is general practice that when a funeral is held in a funeral home, the Vigil is omitted.

THE FUNERAL LITURGY

The Funeral is the main service of worship of the community for the deceased. There are two forms: the "Funeral Mass" and "Funeral Liturgy Outside Mass." The church encourages the celebration of Funerals within the Mass, but when this cannot be done, the second form may be used, and may be presided over by a priest or a deacon or another delegated minister.

The Funeral Mass is the privileged occasion where the grieving community is consoled by the Word proclaimed, and then nourished by the Eucharist. This liturgy consists of the 1) reception of the body into the church, 2) the proclaiming of the liturgy of the Word, 3) a homily, 4) the liturgy of the Eucharist, and 5) the final commendation and farewell.

The Funeral Outside Mass consists of the reception of the body into the church, the liturgy of the Word, a homily, intercessions and the final commendation and farewell.

The readings at the Funeral are always from Scripture, and many suitable options are given in the Lectionary. The readings speak to people in the time of loss and sorrow, proclaiming the great mystery of the resurrection. They instruct us in the dignified memorial of the dead, offer us the hope of being gathered again in God's Kingdom, and encourage us in continued witness as Christians.

A Funeral Mass may not be celebrated on Sundays, Christmas Day, January 1, Holy Thursday, Good Friday, Holy Saturday, or Easter. Only in exceptional circumstances, a funeral liturgy outside Mass may be celebrated on those days.

The family of the deceased are encouraged to select the readings and sacred songs for the Funeral, considering the wide options offered and the appropriateness of choices for the occasion.

When a casket is received into the church, it is draped with a white **pall** immediately following the priest's or deacon's or designated minister's words of introduction, usually at the entrance to the church. Secular symbols of membership in certain groups are not displayed on the casket. **The pall signifies one common Baptism in Christ** — our equality before God, and the dignity of membership in Christ's family of faith. If desired, an open book of the gospels may be present in the church or chapel during the liturgy. Flowers may be brought to the church, but in moderation, and respecting the customs of the particular parish.

The **Easter Candle** is placed near the casket as a strong symbol of our faith in the resurrection and a desire that the deceased may rise with Christ on the last day.

THE HOMILY AT THE FUNERAL

At a Funeral Liturgy, a homily is always given. A homily is the address given by the priest or deacon after the gospel, based on the Scriptures, and relating to the lives of the faithful. At a funeral, the homily dwells on God's compassionate love and the Paschal mystery, offering consolation and strength to face the death of a member of the community. The homilist should refer to the life of the deceased in the homily.

The Funeral Mass must stress our union with Christ in His death and resurrection, and the focus is on Jesus Christ and His love and mercy.

WORDS OF REMEMBRANCE/EULOGIES AT FUNERALS

The rituals for Catholic Funerals encourage that words of remembrance or eulogies for the deceased be celebrated at the Wake Service or Vigil before the Funeral Mass or following the Funeral Mass at the graveside after the Committal or at a reception. These are the most appropriate places in the rituals for these remembrances.

If it is impossible to share words of remembrance at these times, and if requested by the family, some appropriate words of remembrance may be given as a tribute or in gratitude before the celebration of the Eucharist begins, immediately following the

reception of the body or cremains into the Church. The presider should instruct the congregation to be seated at this time for these words.

Words may be shared by one member of the family or by one personal friend. The presentation should not extend beyond five minutes in length in order to not prolong the liturgy itself, and the presenter should check with the presider of the Mass with regards to the theme, tone and content of the presentation. All of these should be in keeping with the dignity, reverence and solemnity of the Funeral Mass and the Church setting.

RITE OF COMMITTAL

The Committal takes place at the cemetery, a sacred place. A Catholic cemetery is an extension of the parish church, and a visible sign and symbol of our unbroken relationship with the community of saints.

The worshipping community shows its care for the remains of the person by the Rite of Committal. The prayers of Committal are offered at the graveside or the place of entombment or at the crematorium.

These prayers are an expression of hope that the deceased awaits the glory of the resurrection. The Committal prayers may be offered by a priest, a deacon, or one of the faithful chosen by the pastor.

"I wait for the Lord, my soul waits, and in His word I hope." (Psalm 130:5)

"No one is born to inhabit the world. Your dead shall live, their bodies shall rise. " (Isaiah 26:18-19)

MUSIC FOR FUNERAL SERVICES

Music at the funeral rites is intended to console and uplift the mourners and to strengthen the unity of the assembly in faith and love. It is fitting to have music as an important part of all the rites of funerals, and the assembly's full participation in singing is strongly encouraged.

It is appropriate that the hymns selected be related to the readings from Sacred Scripture. They should be chosen with care, to create a spirit of hope in Christ's victory over death.

The Psalms are strongly recommended as a genuine expression of grief and praise, and as a sure source of trust in God in time of trial. The texts of other hymns and sacred songs should express the Paschal mystery of Jesus Christ's suffering, death and resurrection. The Christian Funeral should not include secular or sentimental music.

The "Catholic Book of Worship" and other collections of liturgical music have many selections appropriate to funeral rites.

STILLBORNS & PRE-TERM

The remains of fetuses or stillborns are to be treated with Christian dignity at all times. They may be placed in individual graves.

The pastoral care department of a hospital should work closely with the family and the parish pastoral team to ensure proper disposition of the remains.

CREMATION

Cremation is decided upon by the deceased, or by the loved ones concerned at the time of death. Such a choice does not suggest a lack of faith in the resurrection.

The Church continues to encourage the tradition of the burial of a body; however, it does not object to cremation. The funeral liturgy should be celebrated in the parish church before cremation has taken place.

If, however, cremation has already occurred, it is permissible to have the cremains present in the Church during the funeral liturgy, including Mass. The paschal candle may be placed near the table with the vessel of the cremains.

Cremains are always to be treated with dignity. They should be buried or entombed after the funeral. The Church discourages the scattering of cremains and keeping them in possession of family members.

DONATION OF BODY ORGANS

The donation of body organs after a person's death, to another whose own organs no longer function properly, is a generous act which has been approved by the Bishops of Ontario in a special message at Easter in 1990. They say, in part: "The gift to another of a part of our body that we no longer need... is neither an obstacle to God nor a complication for the resurrection of the body. The organ gift itself, moreover, can bring renewed life to the one who receives it."

A decision to make such a donation needs to be made while the person is still alive, and even if the card on one's driver's license is signed to give consent, a person gives advice about donation of his or her body organs to the next of kin. Upon the death of the person, a doctor will proceed with organ retrieval with the agreement of the next of kin. No organs are removed until after the death of the person.

The Church does not oppose the donation of bodies for medical scientific advancement. When this is done, a memorial Mass should be celebrated as soon as possible after the death occurs and there should be a reasonable assurance that the remains will be given appropriate interment.

OFFERING TO THE CHURCH

The monetary offering given by a family to the parish at the time of a funeral is a voluntary offering, and the amount suggested is uniform throughout the diocese. It is referred to as the "stole fee."

In most parishes there are additional fees for an organist and cantor. Please contact your local parish priest regarding these extra costs.

No one is denied the rites of Christian burial through lack of money.

"Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world." (Matt. 25:34)

For further information, contact: Catholic Pastoral Centre or St. Andrew's Cemetery (807) 343-9313