

Epiphany Byzantine Catholic Church Funeral Guide



**Epiphany Byzantine Catholic Church
2030 Old Alabama Rd.**

Roswell, GA 30076
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Introduction

From Psalm 115:5, we read "Precious in the eyes of the Lord is the death of his faithful ones." From time immemorial, Christians have prayed for their dead and elaborated their prayers with ritual.

The death of a loved one is a sorrowful experience for anyone. Often it is a numbing experience as well. Survivors want to do the best they can to honor their departed. They may look around to see what friends or acquaintances have done in similar times of loss. Sometimes they accept whatever suggestions funeral directors offer. They may find themselves burdened with excessive costs or at least conflicting or inappropriate ideas on what to do. Sometimes the ideas of what should be done for a funeral run counter to our Church's Tradition, its laws, and even its faith.

The funeral services of the Byzantine Catholic Church traces its roots to an all-night vigil called the Parastas. The present funeral services are structured similar to Matins and contain a mixture of psalms and hymns contemplating the reality of death, which is the result of sin and alienation from God. Throughout these rites and services, the joy of the Lord's resurrection shines through, since it is this life-giving event which saves us from the totality of death as being final.

The guidelines which follow outline the meaning and practice of funerals and memorial services in our Church to help people make appropriate and acceptable choices when faced with the death of a loved one.

The Funeral Service

In many non-Catholic funerals, a typical funeral service might consist of "calling hours" or a "viewing" at the funeral parlor the evening before, followed by some kind of chapel service either at a church or at the funeral home, followed by something at the graveside. In some cases, the chapel service is eliminated and the funeral service is conducted entirely at the graveside.

For an Eastern Catholic funeral, ideally, all services should be served in the church.

The following guide has been prepared to help guide the family of the deceased of the various options, nuances, and rules regarding funerals in the Byzantine Catholic Church.

The Order of Services

In a Byzantine Catholic funeral, the typical order is as follows:

The Evening Before

Ideally, all services are served in the church.

On the evening before, the service of the “Great Panachida” - also known as the “Parastas” is served. The Parastas can be celebrated in the church without the body if it is impractical to transport the body twice.

Alternatively, at the funeral home, either the Parastas or the Panachida can be served.

The Day Of

On the day of the funeral, the “Office of Christian Burial” is served. It can be integrated with the Divine Liturgy or celebrated as a stand-alone service.

The clergy and faithful gather at the rear of the church. The casket is brought into the narthex, where the first Gospel reading is proclaimed. Then, the clergy process in, followed by the casket, the family, and then the faithful.

The casket is arranged “feet first” – so that spiritually, the eyes of the deceased are looking upon the holy altar.

After the funeral liturgy, the deceased is processed out of the church to the narthex, where a final Gospel reading is proclaimed prior to the casket being loaded into the funeral coach and transported to the cemetery or place of burial.

It is preferred to have an open-casket funeral, however, the funeral can be open-casket or closed-casket.

At the cemetery, a procession is made from the funeral coach to the gravesite, and the funeral concludes with the interment. A final Panachida may also be served at the grave.

A funeral luncheon, or repast, is often held following the interment, or it may be served between the end of the funeral liturgy and the interment. The decision to have a luncheon is at the discretion of the family.

Memorials

Traditionally, in addition to the funeral service, memorial services, consisting of the Divine Liturgy for the Departed, are celebrated at the request of the relatives of the deceased on the following occasions:

Third Day
Ninth Day
Fortieth Day
Three Months
Six Months
First anniversary of death
Third Anniversary of death (some will request a memorial every year on the anniversary of death).

In addition, the departed are remembered on the 5 “All Souls Saturdays” celebrated on the church calendar. A few weeks prior to the start of Lent, the parish sends out a notice asking for the names of family members that parishioners wish to have remembered during these liturgies.

Funeral Do's and Don'ts

Closed Dates

The weekdays of Great Lent are considered “alliturgical days” which, practically speaking, means that the Liturgy of St John Chrysostom is not celebrated. A Parastas and the Office of Christian Burial may be served during Great Lent, but if a Divine Liturgy is also wished for, it should be held on a Saturday.

Funeral Services may not be held on Good Friday, or Sundays. Funeral services on any of the 12 Great Feasts, or on Thursday or Saturday of Holy week are also discouraged.

Memorial Services should not be held from the Saturday of Lazarus through the Sunday of Thomas (i.e. Holy Week and Bright Week), or on any of the 12 Great Feasts.

Cremation

The Catholic Church does not recommend nor approve of cremation, but it is only *permitted*. Cremation may be permitted provided that the reasons for cremating the body are not contrary to the teachings of the Church.

In any case, because the Church believes in the resurrection of the body, the burial of the body is the customary and preferred practice of the Catholic Church.

If the family chooses cremation, the following applies:

- The funeral rites and services are performed with the body present, and then the body cremated afterwards.
- Cremains are to be interred - either in a burial plot or a columbarium.
- The keeping of ashes in the home or the scattering of ashes is not permitted.
- If cremains are not brought to the church, a memorial divine liturgy may be celebrated in place of the Office of Christian Burial and either a parastas or panachida can be celebrated at the cemetery, columbarium or place of inurnment.
- The celebration of the Office of Christian burial with cremains present requires the permission of the Bishop.

Eulogies

Eulogies or the like are not permitted within the context of the funeral rites. These are better left to the repast or a funeral luncheon. The funeral homily is to be centered on the end of our earthly life and the beginning of a new life, restored to us through the resurrection of Jesus Christ as celebrated in the Holy Mysteries of Baptism and Chrismation.

Celebration of Life Wording

Because of humanity's natural aversion to death and dying, a recent trend among funeral homes is to rebrand the funeral into a "celebration of life." However, this language is incompatible with Byzantine Catholic theology. Theologically speaking, the only "celebration" should be about Christ's victory over the grave, and as with the funeral homily, Christ is the focus, not the deceased.

Therefore the proper wording in any funeral announcements should refrain from using "celebration of life" and instead read "Rite of Christian Burial" or "Office of Christian Burial."

Funeral Home only or Graveside only Services

There is a recent trend to just have a short service at the funeral home or the graveside for the sake of brevity. Christians, who believe in eternal life, while lamenting bodily death, do not see death as our final end. As Christians we must proclaim the reality of death and the fact that our true and eternal life is in Christ. This is best done by serving a proper funeral at the church with the Office of Christian Burial.

Fraternal Organizations

Some organizations have rituals which they observe at the death of a member. These may be conducted at the funeral parlor, but not at the funeral service in the church. It is to note that since Catholics are forbidden to join the Masons, no Masonic rites may be conducted at the church or even at the funeral parlor.

Photographs

Recently, photo displays or videos showing the life of the deceased have become part of many funerals. These should be exhibited at the funeral parlor or at the repast. Any photographic displays brought to the church are limited to the narthex.

Prayer Cards / Holy Cards

Many families will create a prayer card / holy card to commemorate the deceased. It will often have an icon or other kind of holy art on the front, and the rear will have the name of the deceased, dates of death, and maybe a bible verse, quote from the liturgy, or some other kind of saying. The parish can provide a sample format. These can be ordered through the funeral home as part of a package, or perhaps through a local printery house. Self-serve print-stock is also available from many online retailers.

Funeral Program / Handout

It is customary but not required to create a small funeral program or handout. This is usually a small booklet that contains a short biography of the deceased, some information about the flow or order of services, directions or information about the place of burial, the location of repast, and/or any other information that would normally not be in the “service book” handed out by the church. The parish can provide a sample format that you can adapt to your needs.

The funeral home often, as part of their “funeral package” will often provide cards, a guest book, and other items.



**Epiphany Byzantine Catholic Church
Funeral Planning Worksheet**

Parishioner:

Name: _____

Address: _____

Phone Number: _____ Email Address: _____

Family Member or Friend the Church should coordinate with in case of death:

Name: _____ Relationship to You: _____

Phone Number: _____ Email Address: _____

Funeral Home and Cemetery Information:

Funeral Home: _____

Place of Burial: _____

Do you want a viewing at the Funeral Home: Y N (circle one)

Do you want a Parastas to be served the evening before: Y N (circle one)

Parastas Location: Church Funeral Home (circle one)

Do you want the Rite of Christian Burial Served With or Without Divine Liturgy:

With Divine Liturgy Without (circle one)

Are there any additional Catholic Clergy we should notify and invite?

Do you want a specific clergy member to preach the homily: _____