



## *Saint Olaf Catholic Church*

### Resources to Prepare a Catholic Funeral

#### **A Catholic Funeral has three interrelated purposes:**

- To proclaim the Death and Resurrection of Jesus through which we find salvation and hope;
- To pray for the deceased person that they will receive the mercy of God;
- To offer comfort and solace to those who mourn.

#### **Three Stages of a Funeral:**

In its fullest form a Catholic Funeral has three stages: the Vigil (Wake), the Funeral Mass/Liturgy, and the Committal or Burial/Interment. Not every funeral has all these stages, which can be dictated by a few circumstances: the wishes of the deceased, local custom, practical arrangement, etc. Each of the three stages will include readings from Sacred Scripture but the amount can vary.

- **Vigil Service (Wake)** "At the vigil, the Christian community keeps watch with the family in prayer to the God of mercy and finds strength in Christ's presence" (Order of Christian Funerals, no. 56). The Vigil Service usually takes place during the period of visitation and viewing at the funeral home. It is a time to remember the life of the deceased and to commend him/her to God. In prayer we ask God to console us in our grief and give us strength to support one another. The Vigil Service can take the form of a Service of the Word with readings from Sacred Scripture accompanied by reflection and prayers. It can also take the form of one of the prayers of the Office for the Dead from the *Liturgy of the Hours*. The clergy and your funeral director can assist in planning such service. It is most appropriate, when family and friends are gathered together for visitation, to offer time for recalling the life of the deceased. For this reason, eulogies are usually encouraged to be done at the funeral home during visitation or at the Vigil Service. A Rosary may be prayed at the Vigil.
- **Funeral Mass/Liturgy** The funeral liturgy is the central liturgical celebration of the Christian community for the deceased. When one of its members dies, the Church encourages the celebration of the funeral liturgy at a Mass. When Mass cannot be celebrated, a funeral liturgy outside Mass can be celebrated at the church or in the funeral home. At the funeral liturgy, the Church gathers with the family and friends of the deceased to give praise and thanks to God for Christ's victory over sin and death, to commend the deceased to God's tender mercy and compassion, and to seek strength in the proclamation of the Paschal Mystery. The funeral liturgy, therefore, is an act of worship, and not merely an expression of grief.
- A Catholic funeral Mass is known as a Requiem Mass - from the first line of the traditional Introit prayer: "Requiem aeternam dona eis, Domine" or "Grant them eternal rest, Lord." We ask that God will welcome this soul into heaven.
- **Rite of Committal (Burial or Interment)** The Rite of Committal, the conclusion of the funeral rite, is the final act of the community of faith in caring for the body of its deceased member. It should normally be celebrated at the place of committal, that is, beside the open grave or place of interment. In committing the body to its resting place, the community expresses the hope that, with all those who have gone before us marked with the sign of faith, the deceased awaits the glory of the Resurrection. The Rite of Committal is an expression of the communion that exists between the Church on earth and the Church in heaven: the deceased passes

with the farewell prayers of the community of believers into the welcoming company of those who need faith no longer, but see God face-to-face.

### **Choosing Readings for a Funeral**

- Whatever the form of Funeral Service there will be readings from Scripture. Sometimes there might be just one but usually there will be either 2 or 3 passages and the Responsorial Psalm. The Church has selected suitable readings for funerals from the Gospels, and Old and New Testaments. The choice may depend on a number of factors: for example, there may be only 2 scripture passages which speak to you, you may have concerns about the length of the liturgy, etc.
- There is not a single best way to choose what scripture passages to use. If possible, look at all the readings. Often with Funerals there is the pressure of time to get everything arranged. It is worth checking whether the deceased either left instructions or had any favorite passages of scripture. You may also find that friends and families have ideas and suggestions or that your Priest will guide you to consider certain texts. Your Priest will be able to advise and discuss your choices and help you make the final decision about the readings.
- You will need to choose people to proclaim the readings in the liturgy. Make sure that whoever you choose will be able to proclaim them clearly with understanding. It is reasonable to expect that they are believing Christians.
- The structure of the Liturgy of the Word is as follows:

#### Three Readings:

- First Reading - from Old Testament. In Easter Season: from the Acts of the Apostles or Book of Revelation
- Responsorial Psalm
- Second Reading (from New Testament)
- Gospel Acclamation
- Gospel

#### Two Readings:

- First Reading from Old or New Testament. In Easter Season: from the Acts of the Apostles or Book of Revelation
- Responsorial Psalm
- Gospel Acclamation
- Gospel

### **Frequently Asked Questions**

Can I choose other Scripture readings not given here?

Yes, this is possible and should be considered in conjunction with your Priest, but all readings must be taken from Holy Scripture.

Can I replace one of the readings with a poem?

No, other readings may not take the place of Sacred Scripture readings in the liturgy. You may read poems, etc. at a Reception.

Should we print the readings in the program?

Best practice suggests the readings should not be included as the readings are meant to be heard proclaimed rather than read along with. However, there may be circumstances where it might be considered, for example, if many of those attending does not have ease with spoken English or if similarly, one of the readings is proclaimed in another language.

### **Music at Funerals**

*"Music is integral to the Funeral rites. It allows the community to express convictions and feelings that word alone may fail to convey. It has the power to console and uplift the mourners and to strengthen the unity of the assembly in faith and love. The texts of the songs chosen for a particular celebration should express the paschal mystery of the Lord's suffering, death, and triumph over death and should be related to the readings from Scripture." (Order of Christian Funerals, number 30)*

While Funeral music may express "convictions and feelings," its subject must always be the Paschal Mystery, and it must be related to the readings from Scripture. Rather than adopting popular secular songs which are inappropriate to a liturgical setting, we should seek out good liturgical music on a paschal theme which can "support, console, and uplift participants and help to create in them a spirit of hope in Christ's victory over death and in the Christian's share in that victory." (Order of Christian Funerals, number 31)

### **Cremation**

*The Church earnestly recommends that the pious custom of burying the bodies of the deceased be observed; nevertheless, the Church does not prohibit cremation unless it was chosen for reasons contrary to Christian doctrine. (canon 1176.3)*

While the Church continues to hold a preference for corporeal burial, cremation has become part of Catholic practice in the United States and the around the world. The Church's reverence and care for the body grows out of a reverence and concern for the person whom the Church now commends to the care of God. This is the body once washed in baptism, anointed with the oil of salvation, and fed with the bread of life. This is the body whose hands clothed the poor and embraced the sorrowing. The human body is so inextricably associated with the human person that it is hard to think of a human person apart from his or her body. *Order of Christian Funerals'* Appendix on Cremation states: "Although cremation is now permitted by the Church, it does not enjoy the same value as burial of the body.

The Church clearly prefers and urges that the body of the deceased be present for the funeral rites, since the presence of the human body better expresses the values which the Church affirms in those rites" (no. 413). If Cremation is chosen, the Rite of Christian Burial instructs that remains are to be buried or interred on blessed grounds or in another place of reverence such as a cemetery. Division of ashes are not acceptable - ashes must be kept whole. A person can be present at Mass prior to cremation.