

# Faith Formation Funeral Rites

S T . I G N A T I U S L O Y O L A P A R I S H

## FUNERAL RITES

FUNERALS
PURPOSE
READINGS
PRAYERS
SYMBOLS
ADAPTATIONS

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The purpose of ritual is to provide for us a way to pray which is both familiar and comforting. At the death of a loved one we often don't have the words to express our sorrow and to increase our hope. As such, the readings, songs, symbols and prayers are for those who mourn as well as those who have passed. It is through this common prayer that we support one another in our loss.

Because of our belief not only in the immortality of the soul, but also in the resurrection of the body, the Church professes hope in the face of death, and acts with charity in the funeral rites. The Church provides a number of prayers for the faithful to offer both to accompany the dying of a loved one and to strengthen our faith upon their death.

<https://www.usccb.org/prayer-and-worship/sacraments-and-sacramentals/bereavement-and-funerals>

We often fail to recognize just how much the funeral liturgy expresses both a reverence for the body and a continued place in the community for the deceased. This is why the Church expresses a preference for the typical presence of the body but still allows cremation, donation of bodies to medical schools, even memorial services where a body has not been recovered. In lieu of a bodily presence we often find some other sort of memorial including pictures and objects from the individual's life. In other words, the funeral liturgy makes tangible our grief, our hope and the presence of our loved one recognizing that death does not break the bonds we have forged in this life.

*(Continued on next page)*

## Music & Readings

As mentioned elsewhere, there are three stages to the funeral rites, the Vigil Service, the Funeral Liturgy and the Final Committal. Each has its own place and purpose. It is more appropriate to have eulogies and tributes presented at the

Vigil rather than at the Funeral Liturgy. Likewise, it is more appropriate to have special songs or readings at the Vigil as well. The Funeral Liturgy is a liturgy and only those songs and readings appropriate for liturgy are to be used. As expressed in the Order of

### Christian 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

*(Continued on page 4)*

## F u n e r a l s ( c o n t . )

"At the death of a Christian, whose life of faith was begun in the waters of Baptism and strengthened at the Eucharistic table, the Church intercedes on behalf of the deceased because of its confident belief that death is not the end, nor does it break the bonds forged in life. The Church also ministers to the sorrowing and consoles them in the funeral rites with the comforting Word of God and the Sacrament of the Eucharist." (Order of Christian Funerals, no. 4)

<https://www.usccb.org/prayer-and-worship/sacraments-and-sacramentals/bereavement-and-funerals/overview-of-catholic-funeral-rites>

There are three distinct parts to the funeral service, the Vigil Service (Wake), the Funeral Liturgy and Rite of Committal (Burial or Interment). While each has its own time and place, again, there are adaptations.

### **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 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.

Many of us may be more familiar with a "Rosary" instead of a more formal Vigil Service. Nevertheless, this is the place where tributes, remembrances and such are more appropriate.

### **Funeral 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,



*Amen, amen,  
I say to you,  
whoever hears  
my word and  
believes in the  
one who sent  
me has  
eternal life  
and will not  
come to  
condemnation  
but has  
passed from  
death to life.  
(Jn 5:24)*

## Funerals (cont.)

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.

### 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.

Excerpts from <https://www.usccb.org/prayer-and-worship/sacraments-and-sacramentals/bereavement-and-funerals/overview-of-catholic-funeral-rites>

Once again, reverence for the body is an important aspect of the Funeral Rites. As such, the Church will allow for cremation, but desires that cremated remains be buried as one would a body, not to be scattered or divided.

The Church does recognize circumstances and will often work with the family. For example, the rite of committal usually takes place immediately following the funeral liturgy. Yet sometimes burial takes place in another city, or with COVID, may be delayed by the cemetery. Still, resources may limit the options a particular church can offer.



## Symbols

The first symbol that the congregation will encounter is the Easter Candle. Here is our symbol of Resurrection, the same symbol used at our baptism.

**“Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?” Rom. 6:3**

After the casket is placed in the middle of the congregation and before the altar, it is sprinkled with holy water. This is again a reminder of baptism as well as a sign of life. Next the casket is covered with a pall, a white garment similar to that worn at baptism. I personally love the sense of covering as one would cover a child at rest.

At the end of the funeral liturgy, the body may again be blessed but this time with incense. The power of

fragrance is something we often miss in our liturgies, yet most of us intuitively recognize the rising of the incense and may recall the invocation, “May our prayers rise like incense.” This last pause in the liturgy allows the congregation to offer their prayers for the deceased.

Other symbols are sometimes included in the liturgy. Some place a crucifix or candle on the casket, something that the family may retain as a tangible reminder of the liturgy.

Although not an integral part of the liturgy, we will often find flowers as part of the environment. Again a tangible sign of life rather than death.

The placement of the casket in the

ceremony is intentional. It says that the deceased is still with us in the community, still praying with us. Most don't know that while the laity are arranged facing the altar, the casket of a priest is often arranged facing the people. Another sign that the deceased stands with us in the congregation, very much as they did in life.

The funeral liturgy ends with the song of farewell, with the familiar prayer “Eternal rest grant unto them, and let perpetual light shine upon them.” While it is a prayer, it is one that we all are familiar with and forms a closure to the funeral liturgy.

## Music & Readings (cont.)

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."

<https://www.usccb.org/prayer-and-worship/sacraments-and-sacramentals/bereavement-and-funerals/music-at-funerals>

To put it bluntly, church is not the place for singing "O Danny Boy" even though it may very well express our grief. The Vigil or after the Committal is more appropriate for this type of music.

The Order of Christian Funerals expresses the same intent for readings at the Funeral Liturgy.

In every celebration for the dead, the Church attaches great importance to the reading of the word of God. The readings proclaim to the assembly the Paschal Mystery, teach remembrance of the dead, convey the hope of being gathered together again in God's kingdom, and encourage the witness of Christian life. Above all, the readings tell of God's designs for a world in which suffering and death will relinquish their hold on all whom God has called his own.

<https://www.usccb.org/prayer-and-worship/sacraments-and-sacramentals/bereavement-and-funerals#tab-introduction-from-the-order-of-christian-funerals-general-introduction-nos-22-23>

The order of readings follows that of a typical Sunday liturgy with a reading from the Old Testament, Responsorial Psalm, New Testament reading, Gospel Acclamation and Gospel. Suggestions for these readings are given for Adults, for baptized Children and for Children who died before baptism. See tabs following link listed above.

Again, adaptations are a regular part of the funeral rites. The church's Rite of Committal may be followed almost seamlessly by a military ceremony.

But, as one might expect, the church is not the appropriate place for the 21 gun salute nor the playing of taps. The same with other ritual elements that may be part of fraternity/sorority or other secular organization. In other words, let church be for church.

Since many who attend the Funeral Liturgy are not able to attend either the Vigil Service or Final Committal, some parishes offer an abbreviated time for family members to offer remembrances. These are to be brief and often previewed by the presiding priest for content as well as length. These may be read just prior to the Song of Farewell.



## Funeral Planning

It is a stressful time and planning a funeral can add to the stress. But it can also be a time for remembrance and a time for grace. Especially in planning music, readings, remembrances and involvement of family and friends. So be sure to occasionally stop, breathe deep, and recall the graces.

As to scheduling, there are four different groups to work with: family and friends, the funeral home, the cemetery and the church. Many just figure the last is the easiest but we have our own constraints. For the church,

we have to consider the availability of the priest, musicians, our own coordinator and some facility issues. Like everyone else, staff have their own appointments both at the parish and away. And since we do work the weekends, there are some who have their "day off" later in the week.

As to planning, it is good for a small group to meet at the parish with a member of the staff (currently that is Kathy Murzyn.) While we speak of picking readings and music it is more of a time of remembrance. Readings are chosen

because they remind you of your loved one—"they really believed in that heavenly feast so maybe that reading from Isaiah 25;6-8" It is also a time to speak about the graces you remember as well as the trials. These may become part of the homily of hope that the priest

presents or it may become part of the prayers of petition. We have found many of these conversations to be consoling to

us, and we hope are consoling to you as well.

***And I heard a voice from heaven saying, "Write this: Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord henceforth." "Blessed indeed," says the Spirit, "that they may rest from their labors, for their deeds follow them!" Rev 14:13***



An "Order of Service" is simply an aid for those attending the funeral to know what happens next. It might be considered comparable to "program" for a wedding yet custom includes a lot more information. For instance, usually there is an extended listing of family members. While not every grandchild or grand niece or nephew may be mentioned, it is still a good review of names for all sitting in the pews. And, having these names and relationships in print, well it makes more tangible and more permanent that connection at a time when we feel these relationships have slipped away.

While eulogies are restricted at a funeral liturgy, having such printed is another way to make

## Order of Service

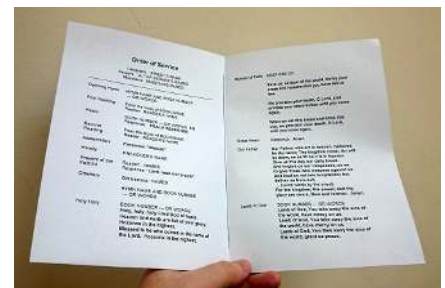
sure that the personal is somehow included. In some churches time for reading this obituary is given before the Song of Farewell.

As to the actual order of service, it may be appropriate to add a brief explanation of a ritual element. For example, a heading like "Placing of the Pall" may be followed with ***"The placing of the pall is a symbolic recollection of baptism when the newly baptized was clothed in a white garment."***

The Order of Service should list the readings, readers, celebrant and other participating folks just like one would want to include them in a wedding program. A concise listing of the elements of a funeral liturgy can be found at St. Joan of Arc church,

<https://stjoanofarc.com/funeral-order-mass>.

Again, there are times when the funeral liturgy might not be a Mass. It could be that a priest is not available for the liturgy and so a deacon will preside. Or it could be that most of the congregation is not Catholic so a simpler service might be preferred. Most funeral homes are prepared to assist with the creation and printing of the Order of Service.



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### To Ponder and to Share

St. Ignatius Loyola Church  
2309 Gaylord St  
Denver, CO 80205  
Phone: 303-322-8042  
Fax: 303-322-2927

**Finding God in All Things**

- Cremation — although the Church does allow for cremation, the cremated remains are to be buried or interred just as one would a body.
- Military funerals—while the custom is to wrap a veteran or active duty military member in the American flag, the flag is normally removed before the funeral liturgy so that the pall may be placed over the casket. At the end of the funeral liturgy, the flag may once again be placed on the casket.
- Final viewing—at the end of the Vigil Service (visitation), the casket is closed. It is not the custom to re-open the casket for a final viewing at the church at the end of the funeral liturgy.

## Memorial Mass or Service

There are many instances where family or friends are not able to attend the usual funeral rites. There is the option of having a Memorial Mass or Memorial Service for those unable to attend. The following link gives a good breakdown of the Memorial Mass and the differences from a Funeral Liturgy.

<https://www.joincake.com/blog/memorial-mass/>

A Memorial Mass is by its nature a religious service. A Memorial Service does not need to be and unless it happens in a church. Therefore, the structure of the service may vary greatly, songs do not need to be liturgical and readings do not need to be biblical. But then again there is not the familiarity of the ritual that is a comfort to many. Again, here is a link that explains the differences between a funeral service and a memorial service and reasons why one may wish to choose one over the other.

<https://www.joincake.com/blog/memorial-vs-funeral/>

Note, you do not have to choose between a funeral and a memorial service. You may have both with the memorial service for those unable to attend the funeral as we have seen during the current pandemic.

Websites:

- <https://www.usccb.org/search?key=funeral>
- <https://www.joincake.com/blog/memorial-mass/> <https://www.joincake.com/blog/memorial-vs-funeral/>  
<https://www.joincake.com/blog/catholic-funeral-readings/>
- <https://stjoanofarc.com/funeral-order-mass>