A Guide to Catholic Funeral Rites

in the

Diocese of Leeds



including

Instructions for my Funeral Liturgy

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Introduction

This guide provides an outline of the funeral rites of the Catholic Church. It is designed to help those who have the responsibility of planning a funeral following the death of a Catholic relative or close friend. It might also be of assistance to Catholics in the preparation of their own funeral arrangements.

The days and weeks that follow the death of a person we love, whether it be a member of our family or a close friend or colleague, can be one of the most emotionally difficult and traumatic times in our lives. When the responsibility of organising the funeral of that person is added to this, our anxieties can be substantially increased.

In the Catholic Church there are wonderful time-honoured rites which help us to prepare for and celebrate the funerals of our deceased loved ones. These rites have developed in the Church over a period of two-thousand years and give expression to the meaning and dignity of our lives as baptised Christians, children of God and members of the Catholic family of faith.

The most important characteristic of a Catholic funeral is that it expresses Christian faith in eternal life and hope in the resurrection of the body at the end of time. Every aspect of a Catholic funeral rite expresses these fundamental beliefs. It is an opportunity to thank God for the gift to us of the life of our departed loved one and, with the aid of our prayers, to send them on their journey to new life with Him.

When someone we love dies, our desire to express our love for them does not suddenly cease; after their death we express our love, above all other ways, in our prayers for them. Prayer is at the centre of Catholic funeral rites: prayer for the repose (the rest) of the soul of our loved one; prayer for the peace they will enjoy from receiving God's merciful forgiveness of any sinfulness; prayer for the gift of new life given by God; and, prayer that we will be reunited with them joyfully one day in God's loving embrace.

In planning a funeral for a Catholic who has died, a relative or friend will be able to take advantage of these treasured and traditional sacred funeral rites. In choosing a Catholic funeral however, it is important to know that the integrity of the rites of the Church must be respected and that it will not be possible for the priest or deacon to change these rites to mirror the practices that are sometimes found in other funeral services.

The following pages provide information about some frequently asked questions.

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Who can have a Catholic funeral?

A Catholic funeral may be celebrated for any person who, as an infant or during the course of their life, was baptised as a Catholic or was received into full communion with the Catholic Church from another Christian denomination. Similarly, children who have died prior to baptism and Catechumens (those who are in the process of being prepared for baptism) may also have a Catholic funeral.

A Catholic funeral may also be celebrated for the deceased member of another Christian denomination, particularly if that person was the spouse of a Catholic partner and had not made an explicit wish prior to their death to be buried according to the rites of their own tradition. Only under very rare circumstances would a Catholic funeral ever be refused to someone who had been baptised as a Catholic.

How do we begin to plan a Catholic funeral for a relative or close friend?

If you have the responsibility of organising the funeral of a relative or friend who was a Catholic, it is important that as soon as possible you contact either the parish priest, assistant priest or deacon (the 'parish clergy') of the Catholic Church where the funeral will take place. This will be done usually at the same time as you contact the funeral directors.

The parish clergy will want to serve you as best they can. This is why consultation with them is so important. The funeral directors will be able to provide you with information about practical arrangements for a funeral but only a Catholic priest or deacon will be able to guide you as to the form of the funeral rites available that will be best suited for your needs and circumstances.

Should our deceased loved one be buried or cremated?

This will be one of the first decisions that the family or friends of the deceased will have to make. In many cases the deceased will have either left instructions or let their wishes be known regarding this decision.

The Catholic Church still recommends, and prefers, the pious custom of burying the bodies of the Faithful. At the same time, the Church respects the choice for cremation. When cremation is chosen, families and friends of the deceased need to know that the cremation should take place after the funeral liturgy and not before it. However, when in rare circumstances this is not possible, the cremated remains are permitted to be present for the Funeral Liturgy.

What are the funeral rites of the Catholic Church?

The Order of Christian Funerals contains all the funeral rites used by the Roman Rite of the Catholic Church. These rites are divided into three key times of prayer for the family and friends of the deceased:

i. The Vigil of Prayer, usually the evening before the funeral,

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ii. The Funeral Liturgy on the day of the funeral,

iii. The Committal at the cemetery or crematorium following the funeral.

These three may, though, comprise a single act of worship either in a church, a cemetery chapel, or a crematorium.

The parish clergy will help you to consider what the best form of the funeral will be for you and your family, and that will respect the wishes of the deceased. The clergy will assist you to make certain that the funeral rites will be celebrated with reverence and dignity, and according to the tradition of the Church.

What is the Vigil of Prayer?

The Vigil of Prayer is a moment of stillness and reflection which helps the family and close friends of the deceased to find strength and hope in God's saving word and to prepare for the Funeral Liturgy. The Vigil is generally a brief service which starts with the body of the deceased being received into the church the evening before the Funeral Liturgy and is followed by scripture readings and prayers. The Vigil may be led by a priest or a deacon but may also be led by a Religious Sister, Religious Brother or trained lay person. Sometimes it may include liturgical hymns or music. The Rosary may also be prayed afterwards at the request of the family.

When the Vigil service is concluded, this is an appropriate time for family and friends to offer their own very personal thoughts and memories or speak about the deceased's life (eulogy). For this reason, the Vigil ought to be scheduled at a time in the evening when family, friends and colleagues of the deceased can attend.

Not all families though choose to have a Vigil service as well as a Funeral Liturgy. In this case the body of the deceased is received into the church or into the crematorium at the beginning of the Funeral Liturgy.

What is the Funeral Liturgy?

There are two forms of the Funeral Liturgy: 'The Funeral Mass' and 'The Funeral Liturgy outside Mass'. Both forms of the Funeral Liturgy are the moment when "...the community 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" (Order of Christian Funerals, §129). This is central to the Catholic funeral rites.

The Funeral Mass is traditionally referred to as a Requiem Mass; 'requiem' meaning 'rest' or 'repose'. In the offering of the Sacrifice of the Mass, Christ's own Sacrifice on the Cross is made present, and in the Requiem Mass we entrust the soul of the person who has died to God. If there is no Vigil service, the Funeral Mass begins with the coffin being blessed with holy water; this reminds us of the person's baptism and the day they were first given a share in Christ's victory over sin and death. The coffin is then placed near the altar with the Easter Candle close by. The coffin may then be covered with a white (or sometimes

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purple or black) cloth, called the 'pall'. Symbols of Christian life, such as a Book of the Gospels or a Bible, and a crucifix (if one is not already fixed to the cover of the coffin) may be placed on the coffin as well.

Readings from the Holy Scriptures are then proclaimed, and a homily given by the priest or a deacon follows. After the prayers of intercession, the Mass continues in the usual way until after Holy Communion, when the prayers of 'Final Commendation and Farewell' conclude the Mass, followed by the procession to the place of burial (if this is close by) or the journey to a cemetery or crematorium.

Another form of the Funeral Liturgy is 'The Funeral Liturgy outside Mass' and is celebrated when it is decided that this would be a more appropriate form of celebration for the needs of the family, or: when a priest is not available; when a Funeral Mass is prohibited on certain days; or, when it is not celebrated in a church. The Funeral Liturgy outside Mass follows the same format of the Funeral Mass as described above with the exception that the Eucharist is not celebrated. When celebrated in a church where the Blessed Sacrament is reserved, the Funeral Liturgy outside Mass may however include the distribution of Holy Communion when this is considered appropriate. The Funeral Liturgy outside Mass usually takes place in a church, but it may sometimes be appropriate to hold it in the chapel at a cemetery or crematorium.

What is the Committal?

The Rite of Committal is a brief service at a cemetery (which means a 'resting place') or at the crematorium. Here the faithful express in prayer their hope that the soul of the person who has died will journey into the welcoming arms of God. The Committal is the final act of saying farewell to our loved ones and friends.

When a body is cremated, it is encouraged that, if possible, a further brief service takes place sometime later for the burial of the ashes. The cremated remains of the deceased should be treated with the same dignity and respect given to the body; namely, the ashes too should be buried or entombed in a mausoleum or columbarium.

The practice of scattering ashes at sea, from the air, or on the ground; making ashes into artefacts or jewellery; or keeping ashes in someone's home, does not reflect the respect and dignity owed to the mortal remains of a baptised Christian.

What role can the family or friends of the deceased play in the funeral rites?

The family and friends of the deceased, if they feel able, can assist during the funeral rites in a variety of ways, for example:

- Assist with carrying or escorting the coffin of their deceased loved-one into and from the place where the funeral rites are to be celebrated.
- Place on the coffin the symbols of Christian faith, such as the pall, a crucifix and a Bible.

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- Place a photograph of the deceased or Mass cards on a table near the coffin.
- Choose the scripture readings that will be used. These can be chosen from among the many scripture passages selected by the Catholic Church for the funeral rites. The parish clergy will help the family or friends of the deceased with this.
- If a family member or a friend of the deceased regularly helps to read the scripture readings at Mass in their parish, then they can assist by reading the scripture passage(s) which have been chosen and the intercessions during a Funeral Liturgy. If family members or friends feel they will not be able to read, then the parish clergy or a member of the parish will do this. The Gospel Reading though is proclaimed always by a priest or deacon.
- Speak briefly about the deceased. The Order of Christian Funerals states that a member of the family may speak in remembrance of the deceased at an appropriate time during the Vigil of Prayer or before the final commendation at the end of the Funeral Liturgy. Alternatively, the words of remembrance can be given at the beginning of the Funeral Liturgy, after the body has been received and before the opening prayer. In this way, the family can welcome everyone to the Funeral Liturgy and speak in remembrance of the person for whom the prayer of the Liturgy is to be offered.

  It is always best for a written text to be used and be no more than three of four minutes in length. If a family member or close friend wishes to speak in remembrance, it is important to ensure they will be able to carry out this honour without becoming too distraught or emotionally breaking down.

  Speaking about a loved-one at a funeral is never an easy thing for someone to do and although a person may feel strong enough before a Funeral Liturgy, their grief and emotion may overtake them when it comes to addressing the congregation. For this reason, it is wise sometimes to consider asking a friend or colleague of the deceased to read out what has been written by the family on their behalf.

What music should we have during the Catholic funeral rites?

Over many centuries, much magnificent and beautiful music has been written for the funeral rites of the Catholic Church. Modern composers continue to take their inspiration from these rites, particularly the composition of music for the Requiem Mass and hymns written specially to reflect the hope we have in the resurrection to new life in Christ.

The parish clergy will be able to help you to decide which will be the most fitting hymns or music for the Catholic funeral rites of your loved-one. When choosing which hymns might be sung, it is important to remember that not everyone feels comfortable singing in these sensitive situations or may find it difficult emotionally to do so. Indeed, there is no need to have hymns as such; it may be more appropriate and helpful to you, your family and those who attend the funeral rites to have gentle and supportive music played

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on the organ or another instrument at the proper moments during the celebration. Again, the parish clergy will be able to help you with this.

Above all, the music chosen for Catholic funeral rites must express the teaching of our Christian faith about death and eternal life; it should create in the mourners "a spirit of hope in Christ's victory over death and in the Christian's share in that victory" (Order of Christian Funerals §31).

When the Funeral Liturgy takes place in a church, any music chosen for the liturgy should be played by an organist or other instrumentalist(s) and choral music should be sung by a soloist, a choir and/or the entire congregation.

When the Funeral Liturgy takes place in a cemetery chapel or a crematorium chapel, the use of recorded liturgical music to play or support singing should only be used when an organist or instrumentalist cannot be secured for the service. To ensure that this recorded music is of a quality suitable for the funeral rites of the Catholic Church, advice should be sought from the parish clergy.

The parish clergy or the funeral directors will be able to advise the family of the deceased whether the cemetery chapel or crematorium chapel has a sound system or facilities suitable for playing this recorded music.

Sometimes, the family members of the deceased have been to other types of funerals where popular songs or secular music have been sung or played that may have held a special meaning for the deceased and to the family. However, in most instances this music is not appropriate for use in the funeral rites of the Catholic Church.

While not all music can be used during a Catholic funeral liturgy, if a family does have a very strong desire to sing a popular secular song or have a piece of secular music played that was particularly special to the deceased, then this can be done at the conclusion of the Rite of Committal at the graveside or the crematorium, or more extensively at other times after the Vigil or the Funeral Liturgy when family and friends gather socially to console each other, recall personal memories of their loved one and feel able to express more easily, and with greater leisure, their feelings and emotions together.

Conclusion

With the celebration of Catholic funeral rites, there comes the assurance that these rites have provided lasting comfort and hope to countless generations of Christians.

This guide has been provided to set out what expectations are to be considered as integral to Catholic funeral rites for those who have the responsibility of organising a funeral for a Catholic relative or friend, particularly if they are not familiar with these rites.

I hope too that the guide will be a useful resource for Catholics who wish to leave instructions for those who will have the responsibility of making the final arrangements for their funeral after their death. A two-page form, '*Instructions for my Funeral Liturgy*', is appended to these guidelines to assist with recording these instructions in writing.

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Above all, it is important for those organising a funeral to be guided and assisted by the local Catholic parish clergy; they will want to do all they can to provide pastoral support and the consolations of the Catholic faith to those who are grieving the loss of their relative or friend.

In prayer, let us commend the souls of our departed loved ones and all the faithful departed to the loving mercy of God:

Eternal rest grant unto them, O Lord,
and let perpetual light shine upon them.
May they rest in peace. Amen.

✠ Marcus Stock
Bishop of Leeds

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INSTRUCTIONS FOR MY FUNERAL LITURGY

This document '*Instructions for my Funeral Liturgy*' is designed to be read and filled-in alongside the '*Guide to Catholic Funeral Rites in the Diocese of Leeds*'. Completing this document will help you to leave instructions concerning the funeral liturgy that you wish to be celebrated after your death. Because your Catholic faith has been so central in your life, it is important that those who are entrusted with making the final arrangements after your death ensure that your Funeral Liturgy expresses the profound truths of your faith.

Please take time to consider the options outlined in this form. You may choose to complete it yourself or ask a Catholic relative, friend, or member of the clergy to assist you. Once completed, be sure to share the information with your family and/or friends, especially those you have chosen to take responsibility for making your funeral arrangements after your death (your next of kin or the 'contact person').

Your Personal Details

Surname: .....

First Names: .....

Address: .....

..... *Postcode:* .....

Telephone Number(s): .....

Name of your Parish (e.g., St Joseph's, Pudsey): .....

If you wish for your funeral to take place other than in the parish in which you resided at the time of your death, please give details: .....

.....

Next of Kin or Contact Person

(Please give the details of a family member, friend or executor who understands your wishes regarding your funeral and will help coordinate details with the parish)

Surname: .....

First Names: .....

Address: .....

..... *Postcode:* .....

Telephone Number(s): .....

Relationship of contact person to you: .....

Have you made arrangements with a particular firm of Funeral Directors? *Yes* ☐ *No* ☐

If yes, please give details: .....

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The Vigil of Prayer

If circumstances allow, would you like your body to be received into church the evening before your funeral for the Vigil of Prayer? *Yes* ☐ *No* ☐

The Funeral Liturgy

Please indicate below any preferences you have for the scripture readings for your funeral liturgy (the selection of readings which you can choose from the *Order of Christian Funerals* can be obtained from your parish clergy).

Old Testament Reading: .....

Responsorial Psalm: .....

New Testament Reading: .....

Gospel: .....

Please indicate below any preferences you may have for the hymns/music for your funeral liturgy (see the information in the '*Guide to Catholic Funeral Rites in the Diocese of Leeds'.*):

Entrance Hymn/Music: .....

Offertory Hymn/Music (when the Funeral Liturgy is a Mass): .....

Communion Hymn/Music (when the Funeral Liturgy is a Mass): .....

Recessional Hymn/Music: .....

Is your preference for burial?

Yes ☐ *No* ☐

If yes, please give details of any arrangements you have made:

Name of Cemetery: .....

Location of Cemetery: .....

Registered Number of grave or burial plot: .....

Is your preference for cremation?

Yes ☐ *No* ☐

If yes, please indicate the cemetery or columbarium where you wish your ashes to be buried/interred after cremation: .....

Please give a copy of this information to your parish priest, your next of kin or contact person named above, and to your funeral director if you have a pre-paid funeral plan. Be sure to update this form with your parish clergy and your next of kin or contact person when necessary.

If you have questions that have not been addressed, please speak with your parish clergy.

Signature: ..... Date: .....

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