

# NORMS FOR CATHOLIC FUNERAL RITES

Diocese of Covington, Kentucky

## Introduction

1. These diocesan norms are used by priests and deacons to plan the celebration of the Funeral Rites. Each parish should have guidelines for the celebration of the Funeral Rites in a parish church. Parish guidelines can be more specific, but parish guidelines must be in conformity with the diocesan guidelines.
2. "In the face of death, the Church confidently proclaims that God has created each person for eternal life and that Jesus, the Son of God, by his death and resurrection, has broken the chains of sin and death that bound humanity. Christ 'achieved his task of redeeming humanity and giving perfect glory to God, principally by the paschal mystery of his blessed passion, resurrection from the dead, and glorious ascension.'" (Order of Christian Funerals [OCF, 1])
3. "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 her 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." (OCF, 4)
4. Priests are encouraged to make full use of the various rituals of the Funeral Rite to help comfort and console the family and friends of the deceased. These rites and prayers include the *Prayers after Death*, *Gathering in the Presence of the Body* and the *Transfer of the Body to the Church*.
5. Through the celebration of the funeral rites, particularly the *Vigil for the Deceased*, the *Funeral Liturgy* and the *Rite of Committal*, the Church calls all to pray for the deceased, and in fact, for all the dead.

## General Principles and Norms

6. In the Diocese of Covington the *Order of Christian Funerals* is to be used as the normative liturgical ritual for the celebration of the funeral rites.
7. "Part I of the *Order of Christian Funerals* is divided into three groups of rites that corresponds in general to the three principal ritual moments in the funeral of Christians: "Vigil and Related Rites and Prayers," "Funeral Liturgy" and "Rite of Committal." (OCF, 50) The General Introduction and the Introduction to each rite or group of rites, provide guiding principles for the proper liturgical celebration of the rites according to the mind of the Church.
8. It is the responsibility of the pastor to ensure that these liturgical principles are respected, understood and used with pastoral sensitivity by all those who participate in the ministry of consolation: to care for the dying, to pray for the dead, to comfort those who mourn.

9. It is the responsibility of the pastor to both inform the secular funeral service providers of the proper order and liturgical expression of the funeral rites as set forth in the *Order of Christian Funerals* and to ensure that they are followed according to the mind of the Church.

10. The Church encourages the full celebration of the funeral rites, especially the Funeral Mass, for her faithful deceased members. No one should be denied the Church's funeral rites because of the neglect of the practice of the faith of their family members. Every Catholic, unless specifically excluded according to the norms of Church law, is entitled to the Church's ministry at the time of death. It is the responsibility of the pastor to ensure that the Funeral Rites are available for these persons.

### **Liturgical Ministers**

#### **11. Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion**

During the funeral Mass a layperson who distributes Holy Communion must be an appointed extraordinary minister of Holy Communion. The *Norms for Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion* of the Diocese of Covington states, "on an occasion such as a wedding or funeral, an extraordinary minister of Holy Communion from one parish/institution may be given permission to function for the single occasion in another parish/institution. The permission is given by the pastor or chaplain where the celebration occurs (VI, pg. 6)."

#### **12. Lectors**

The person(s) who proclaim the word of God during the celebration of the funeral liturgy must be Catholic and must have completed a diocesan education for lectors and been commissioned by their pastor. Such persons should be asked to proclaim the word of God during the funeral liturgy. On the rare occasion when a commissioned lector, either from the parish or the family of the deceased is not available a Catholic member of the parish or of the family who is "at least 16 years of age" (Norms for Lectors, 2010) may be asked to proclaim the readings.

13. A lector who has been commissioned to serve in another diocese may serve in this ministry in the Diocese of Covington for the one time occasion of a funeral liturgy with the approval of the local pastor where the funeral occurs.

### **Special Pastoral Concerns**

#### **14. Cremation**

Respect for the human body is envisioned in the Funeral Rites of the Church. "The body of the deceased Catholic Christian is also the body once washed in Baptism, anointed with the oil of salvation, and fed with the Bread of Life. Thus, the Church's reverence of the sacredness of the human body grows out of a reverence and concern both natural and supernatural for the human person. The body of the deceased brings forcefully to mind the Church's conviction that the human body is in Christ a temple of the Holy Spirit and is destined for future glory at the resurrection of the dead." (OCF, 412)

15. "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 Funeral Rites, since the presence of the human body better expresses the values which the Church affirms in those rites." (OCF, 413)

16. "When extraordinary circumstances make the cremation of the body the only feasible choice, pastoral sensitivity must be exercised by priests, deacons and others who minister to the family of the deceased." (OCF, 415)

17. "The cremated remains of a body should be treated with the same respect given to the human body from which they come. This includes the use of a worthy vessel to contain the ashes, the manner in which they are carried, the care and attention to appropriate placement and transport, and the final disposition. The cremated remains should be buried in a grave or entombed in a mausoleum or columbarium. The practice of scattering cremated remains on the sea, from the air or on the ground, or keeping cremated remains in the home of a relative or friend of the deceased are not the reverent disposition that the Church requires. Whenever possible, appropriate means for recording with dignity the memory of the deceased should be adopted, such as a plaque or stone which records the name of the deceased." (OCF, 417)

18. Therefore, in the Diocese of Covington the following norms are to be observed:

When the choice has been made to cremate a body, it is recommended that the cremation take place after the funeral liturgy followed by the proper disposition of the remains according to the norms of the Church, that is, burial in a grave, or entombment in a mausoleum or columbarium.

19. If cremation takes place before the Funeral Liturgy, a burial place in a grave, or entombment in a mausoleum or columbarium for the cremated remains must be established in order to celebrate the Funeral Liturgy in a church.

### **The Homily and the Remembrance of the Deceased**

20. "A brief homily based on the readings should always be given at the funeral liturgy, but never any kind of eulogy. The homilist should dwell on God's compassionate love and on the paschal mystery of the Lord as proclaimed in the Scripture readings." (OCF, 141)

21. "The homilist should also help the members of the assembly to understand that the mystery of God's love and the mystery of Jesus' victorious death and resurrection were present in the life and death of the deceased and that these mysteries are active in their own lives as well. Through the homily members of the family and community should receive consolation and strength to face the death of one of their members with a hope nourished by the saving word of God." (OCF, 27)

22. The fact that a eulogy is not permitted does not mean that there is to be no reference to the deceased person during the homily. The homilist helps the bereaved to understand the mystery of God's love and the paschal mystery in the life of the deceased person and in their own lives. References to the person's life of faith and love are obviously appropriate.

23. Therefore, in the Diocese of Covington the following norms are to be observed:

In the Diocese of Covington, it is recommended that the Vigil (Wake) is the most appropriate time for members of the family and friends to share memories of the deceased or to pay tribute to the deceased through vocal remembrances, photographs, favorite songs, etc.

24. The reception after the burial is another appropriate time for the remembrances because there is less of an emotional burden and the context is looking toward the future in a more positive manner.

25. The words of remembrance may be given in church before the Mass begins. If a family member wishes to express words of remembrance of the deceased in church, the following norms are to be observed:

- a) Only one family member or friend is to speak.
- b) The words of remembrance must be in writing and approved in advance by the priest celebrant.
- c) The words of remembrance should not exceed three minutes in length and should take place before the Mass begins or after the Prayer after Communion.

### **Keeping the Memory of the Deceased**

26. In keeping with our Catholic tradition, all are encouraged to ensure that the memory of our dead is observed in the following ways:

- Offering of Masses for the deceased, especially on the anniversary of death.
- Parish remembrance on All Souls Day.
- A parish celebration of Mass for the recently deceased of the last year during the month of November.
- The encouragement of cemetery visitation.
- Praying for the living and the dead.

### **Music for the Funeral Liturgy**

27. "Music is integral to the Funeral Rites. It allows the community to express convictions and feelings that words 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." (OCF, 30)

28. In some pastoral settings, there has been an increasing confusion about the appropriate types of music for funerals. An almost "anything goes" mentality has crept into the full funeral rites, that is, the Vigil (Wake), the funeral Mass and the committal.

29. Non-liturgical or secular music is forbidden before or during the Funeral Rites, particularly in the church. Thus, such music as "Wind Beneath My Wings," "From a Distance," "Danny Boy," "The Notre Dame Victory March," etc., may not be used during the rites, neither before nor after the Funeral Rites in church.

30. The priest celebrant is to approve and authorize the use of proper liturgical music for all the Funeral Rites.

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