Saint Mary, Star of the Sea, Largs
Our Lady of Perpetual Succour, Millport

Guidelines for the Celebration of Funerals

Sincerest condolences from the whole parish are extended to you and your loved ones on the death of your beloved relative or friend.

Bereavement can be very painful for any family. It deserves all our compassion and support. No-one can replace the one who has gone.

The deceased has been a treasured part not only of their immediate family but also of the wider parish and local community.
In a very real way, then, your loss is our loss; your grief is our grief.

The Funeral Rites provide a genuine opportunity for the whole parish to sustain you with our love, with our prayer
and with our hope-filled worship of the God of life and death.

May the one you have loved, and whom God has taken to himself, rest in his peace. May you live in the consolation and hope of being reunited with them one day in the everlasting joy of the Kingdom of Heaven.

The present Guidelines are intended to assist you in working with the priest to prepare the Catholic Funeral Rites for the worthy burial of the deceased. Please read them carefully.

Introduction

Catholic funerals are sacred rites which are intended to draw those assembled into a deeper faith in the victory which Jesus Christ won over sin and death by his own death and Resurrection. In this way, the rites aim to bring deep consolation to the bereaved and to instil profound hope in them, and in the whole community, that the deceased will rise again with Christ.

It is therefore important that we observe these rites faithfully out of respect for the Lord and the one he has chosen to take to Himself. The priest in particular is the servant of the Church's worship and must be the first to ensure that the rites are observed fully, with dignity and with compassion.

What are Catholic Funeral Rites?

There are various rites which can accompany the farewell of someone to be buried from a Catholic parish. Which, and how many, of these rites are used will depend on the circumstances and the choice of the individual or family who comes to an agreement with the priest about which rites would best be suited to their situation.

The *first rite* is called a Vigil or, more commonly, the "reception into the church." This is a brief ceremony during which the coffin is brought into the church the night before the funeral. The mortal remains of the deceased remain overnight in the presence of the Sacrament of the Risen Body of Christ. In its own way, this rite already points us in hope towards the desired

resurrection of the deceased at the end of time. This rite can be requested for any deceased person.

The *second rite* is the funeral itself and has two forms.

Firstly, there is the "Requiem Mass", which is the celebration of the Sacrifice of the Mass in the presence of the deceased, with family, friends and parishioners in attendance. The Requiem Mass is offered to God for the forgiveness of the sins of the deceased and for their entrance into the Kingdom of Heaven. The readings, prayers and songs of the Mass all refer to the death and resurrection of Jesus who is himself our Life.

The Requiem Mass brings great consolation and peace to those gathered and is carried out in a deep spirit of prayer and of faith and hope in God. The Requiem Mass is for Catholics, Catechumens and for children who have died before baptism.

With the Bishop's permission, the Church's funeral rites may also be celebrated for a baptized non-Catholic, provided this would not be contrary to the wishes of the deceased person and if the person's own minister is unavailable.

Secondly, there can be a funeral rite without the Mass. This is less common than the Mass and should be a truly exceptional choice due to serious personal or family circumstances. It would be chosen only after close consultation between the inidivdual or the bereaved and the priest. This rite can take place in the church or at the crematorium.

The *third rite* is the traditional rite of burial in a grave. This usually follows immediately upon the funeral and is a brief service of prayer and petition at the graveside. This rite is for anyone being buried in a grave.

The *fourth rite* is a brief service of prayer and petition at the crematorium after the funeral in the church. This rite is not required if the funeral rite mentioned above has taken place in the crematorium or if the deceased has been buried.

The *fifth rite* is a brief service of prayer and praise at the graveside to bury the ashes of the deceased.

What do Catholic funeral rites mean?

The funeral rites draw us to contemplate the death and resurrection of Jesus. He gave us the gift of our beloved relative or friend who has now died. He is the hope of the forgiveness of their sins and of their entry into eternal life.

"Celebrating the life" of the deceased is a commendable practice which is common in society today. This has its place in events prior or subsequent to the funeral, e.g. at the "wake" or the tea or lunch offered after the rites are completed; but it is not the main focus of the Catholic funeral rites. These look rather to the Risen Christ and pray that he will now share that life with the deceased for ever, just as he shared their life on this earth with us in all its richness and goodness.

Readings used in the funeral rites

All readings during the funeral rites are taken from those passages of Sacred Scripture, the Bible, approved by the Church for this purpose. They are readings which proclaim the mysteries of the death and resurrection of Jesus and the relationship between our death and those mysteries. The Word of God has a power of truth and consolation that no other word can have, no matter how worthy of mention.

It is not therefore permitted to have at a Catholic funeral rite any non-Christian or secular readings of any kind. The selection of readings from which those for the funeral can be chosen are found at the web link which the priest will provide.

Hymns and music in the funeral rites

Music is an important part of 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. 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.

Hymns for funerals contained in the parish hymnal may be used. Hymns from other sources may only be used with the consent of the parish priest.

Songs composed by secular writers are forbidden by the Church.

Instrumental music must likewise be in keeping with the sacred and solemn nature of the funeral rites. Its purpose is not to draw attention to the deceased but to turn our hearts and minds towards God. Normally, the organ is played during the funeral rites.

Pipers may play before the funeral rite begins or after it concludes. The pipes may not be played inside the church but only in the outside forecourt.

Eulogies

There is no obligation to give a eulogy, so no-one should feel pressurised into doing so. It is better for the family to provide the priest with some notes about the deceased which he can then incorporate into his homily at the funeral itself.

On the occasion of the Vigil, or reception of the coffin into the church the night before the funeral, the law of the Church permits that, as the Vigil concludes "a member or a friend of the family may speak in remembrance of the deceased" (*General Introduction to the Order of Christian Funerals*, n.80).

On the occasion of the Funeral Mass itself, the eulogy is only permitted before the Mass begins. It must be brief (five or six minutes) so that the Mass and procession to the cemetery or crematorium are not delayed. The text of the eulogy must be made available to the priest no later than 24 hours before the Funeral Mass. The priest may request that the text be modified

or shortened so that it is in keeping with both the solemn occasion and sacred place. Only one person should deliver the eulogy and do so in a clear and loud voice.

Once the coffin is in place at the front of the church, the priest will invite the congregation to be seated. After briefly welcoming everyone, he will invite the person who is to give the eulogy to approach the microphone. Once the delivery is completed, the person in question returns to his or her place. The priest will then invite everyone to stand and, making the sign of the Cross, will begin the Funeral Mass proper.

Alternative moments for giving a eulogy can be during gatherings of the family and friends prior or subsequent to the funeral rites, including at the graveside after the burial or at the crematorium after the prayer service is concluded.

Participation of the Family in the Requiem Mass

Apart from carrying or accompanying the coffin into and out of the church, the immediate family can perform the following functions during the Requiem Mass:

*Once the coffin has reached the sanctuary, they may place the crucifix, the book of the Gospels and the pall on the coffin.

*They may choose the hymns for the Mass in line with what was said above.

*They may proclaim the readings from Sacred Scripture which they have chosen for the Mass from among the selection of readings provided to them by the priest.

*They may read the intercessions or bidding prayers.

*They may bring up the gifts of bread and wine at the offertory.

It may be that a family does not wish to participate in any of the above, or in only one or two aspects of it.

Cooperation with the Undertaker

The priest and the undertaker work together with the family to ensure that the funeral rites are celebrated timeously and with solemn respect and dignity.

The undertaker may offer to produce a booklet (Order of Service) for the Requiem Mass. It is also important to know that hymn books are available in the church if the family prefers not to have a booklet produced.

If the services of an organist are required for the funeral, either the undertaker or the priest will provide a list of organists. Any fee required by the organist should be discussed directly with the family or through the undertaker.

Does the funeral cost anything?

There is no charge for any funeral rite. If a family wishes to make a donation to the priest and/or to the parish, whatever is

offered will be gratefully received. To respect the will of the donors, it is important to be clear if an offering is being given to the priest personally and/or to the upkeep of the church.