



Planning a Catholic Funeral

Based on the 'Guide for preparing a Catholic Funeral'
by the Archdiocese of Cardiff Liturgical Commission

“If we have died with Christ, then we shall live with Him too” (Romans 6: 8)

*“In him the hope of blessed resurrection has dawned, that those saddened by the certainty of dying might be consoled by the promise of immortality to come. Indeed for your faithful, Lord, life is changed not ended, and, when this earthly dwelling turns to dust, an eternal dwelling is made ready for them in heaven”
(Preface of the Funeral Mass).*

At this time of your loss we would like to offer you our condolences and an assurance of the prayers of our parish family. Please know that each day those who have died are remembered at Mass, as are those who mourn. We hope the Church's prayer will be a comfort and consolation for you at this testing time.

Preparing the funeral of someone who has died can be a daunting task. This leaflet has been prepared to make the preparations easier and help you to understand the nature of a Catholic funeral. We invite you to reflect upon what we present to you as you prepare to meet with the priest or deacon who will be conducting the funeral. The Catholic Church has a two thousand-year history; from the storehouse of her wisdom and experience she provides directions about how funerals are to be conducted. Our parish clergy have a lot of experience of preparing and celebrating the Funeral Liturgy of the Church; they will listen to your suggestions and consider how we can then best prepare the Liturgy in line with the tradition of the Church.

Understanding the Catholic Funeral Liturgy

The purpose of the Catholic Funeral Liturgy is to offer worship and thanksgiving to God, the author of all life; to pray for the deceased commending them to God's loving care and mercy, and to offer support to the bereaved. Therefore, God is always the central focus of our actions at a Catholic Funeral.

Just as there are stages in the process of grief, the Church encourages us to say farewell to our loved ones in three main stages:

- **The Prayer Vigil**, usually the evening before the funeral;
- **The Funeral Liturgy** - a Funeral (Requiem) Mass or Funeral Service;
- **The Committal** at the cemetery or crematorium.

When it is not practical to celebrate all three stages the funeral may comprise a single act of worship either in the church, funeral home, cemetery chapel or crematorium.

The Prayer Vigil

The Vigil can be held either at the home of your loved one, in the church or the funeral home. It offers quiet support, with readings from scripture and prayers. It may include the Rosary and appropriate poems and songs.

The Funeral Liturgy

When a Catholic dies the Funeral Liturgy usually takes the form of the celebration of Mass; the highest form of prayer the Church can offer in which the Sacrifice of Christ himself is made present. The Funeral Mass is the Mass as celebrated everyday within the Catholic Church, but with the deceased present and funeral prayers added. In some circumstances it may be more appropriate to have a shorter Funeral Liturgy which would be celebrated by a priest or deacon; we are happy to discuss this with you. We also ask you to keep in mind that *it cannot be guaranteed that all the deceased's wishes will be fulfilled, even where a prepaid funeral plan has been arranged*; **the parish is bound to follow the funeral rites as prescribed by the Catholic Church.**

As family and friends of the deceased, if you feel able, you are welcome to assist during the Funeral Liturgy in a variety of ways, for example:

- Placing on the coffin symbols of Christian faith, such as the pall (a large white cloth which reminds us of Baptism), a crucifix and a bible.
- Placing a photograph of your loved one on a table near the coffin.
- Reading the scripture passages or the intercessions that you choose when you meet with the priest/deacon.
- Speaking “Words of Remembrance” at the start of the Funeral Liturgy. The words are a welcome to those present and a tribute to your loved one and should be no more than a single side of A4. They are read by one person, usually a family member or friend, and must be seen by the priest or deacon beforehand.
- Bringing the bread and wine to the altar for the Sacrifice (if a Funeral Mass)

The Funeral usually takes place in church but, if it is not a Mass, it may sometimes be appropriate to hold it in the chapel of the funeral home, cemetery or crematorium immediately before the Committal.

The Committal

The final act of saying farewell takes place in a brief service at the graveside or at the crematorium. When a body is cremated it is encouraged that there be a further brief service, some time later, for the burial of the ashes.

When choosing cremation please keep in mind that the Catholic Church specifies that cremated remains are to be treated with the **same reverence** as the body of a deceased person. This means that the remains, **in their entirety**, are to be placed in a **worthy vessel** and, following the religious services, to be buried or entombed in **consecrated ground**. The member of the clergy who meets with you can provide a document for you to read if you wish to understand the reasons.

Music at Funerals

The use of music in the various stages of the funeral is important, and carefully selected hymns and music will enhance the service and bring back memories of your loved one. Music at a Funeral Liturgy should *always be drawn from the broad repertoire of Christian hymns and compositions*. A piece of music from another source, such as a favourite dance, song, piece of music may be used at the graveside or the crematorium provided there is nothing in it inconsistent with the Catholic Faith; the priest or deacon will be able to advise of the appropriateness of choices. You can also view a list of music suggestions for funerals by visiting <http://allsaintsrcnewport.org.uk/sacraments-formation/funerals/>

In considering what to sing, please take into account who is likely to be at the liturgy and how they will respond to the invitation to sing. If the congregation is small, or unfamiliar with singing, it may be better to rely more on the organ or other instrumental music.

Readings at Funerals

Through the words of Sacred Scripture (the Bible) God reveals himself to us and offers us direction and comfort in all circumstances of our lives. The readings at funerals are chosen only from those provided for Funerals in the Roman Lectionary. When meeting with the clergy they will help guide you through the options to choose appropriate texts for the time and circumstances. Reading of poems and other texts may be used at the graveside or crematorium, once again, provided there is nothing in them inconsistent with the Catholic Faith.

Please speak with the priest/deacon looking after the funeral before finalising any arrangements with the Funeral Director. If you need to contact us urgently please call the parish office on 01633 265533.

Celebrating the life of your loved one

In the Catholic identity the 'celebration of the life of' the deceased takes place either the night before or after the Funeral Liturgy at a social gathering. This is the better place for the display of photos and the use of popular music, poems, readings etc. that were particularly liked by the your loved one or is associated with them by others. These things can encourage conversation and the sharing of personal memories.

Journeying together after the funeral

Once the rush of the funeral has passed by, we may find ourselves facing a few questions and just need a friendly face to approach. The **All Saints Befrienders Group** offers support and encouragement to anyone who is alone, lonely or bereaved and who would like company, a friendly chat and a cup of tea. For more information visit the latest edition of the parish newsletter for more information - <http://allsaintsrcnewport.org.uk/newsletters/>