

The Catholic Funeral

The common celebration of the rites after death takes the form of three liturgical celebrations: a Vigil, and Funeral liturgy, and the Rite of Committal.

Vigil/Wake Service: The Vigil for the Deceased usually takes place the day or evening prior to the funeral before the Funeral liturgy and Rite of Committal. The Vigil consists of Scripture, Psalmody, and Reflections (Memories) or Eulogies about the deceased loved one.

Rosary: Prior to the revision of the funeral rites, the common practice was to gather mourners together at the funeral home to pray the Rosary. This private devotion was prayed to fill the void now usually filled today by the Vigil celebration described above. If the family desires a rosary, it may be prayed prior to the start of the Vigil.

Funeral Mass: The Funeral Liturgy usually is within the celebration of the Eucharist (Mass). The Funeral Mass is when the attention or focus is on the eternal life of the loved one. The funeral consists of receiving the body during which it is sprinkled with holy water and covered with the funeral pall. Following Communion, special prayers are added to the liturgy along with the ritual gestures of incensing the body. Funerals may be celebrated at any time except the Triduum in Holy Week, Easter and its successive Sundays, and Holy Days of Obligation (i.e. Christmas, the Assumption etc.)

Rite of Committal: The final piece of the Order of Christian Funerals is the Rite of Committal which usually takes place at the cemetery. Following the funeral liturgy, the body is taken in procession to the place of interment. Special prayers and readings are celebrated committing the body to the ground as well as the life of the deceased person to God.

The Catholic Funeral (continued)

Music: Music is an integral part of any liturgical celebration. Music selected should always be appropriate to the occasion and to the liturgy. Some music is inappropriate for use in the liturgy. Secular music, in particular, is inappropriate within the liturgy because it is not written for that purpose. We have musicians and musical selections that will guide you if you need help in this area.

Cremation: The Roman Catholic position concerning the practice of cremation underwent significant change in 1963. Church Law now permits cremation.

Other Particulars: The Church offers the funeral rites to anyone who seeks them. Christians of other denominations may be afforded the rites of the Church. Catechumens and other non-baptized persons may be buried from the Church. Some circumstances may preclude the celebration of the Eucharist but not the other rites.

All of these liturgies and rites may be adapted in light of the circumstances surrounding the death and the situation of the deceased family. Priests, Deacons, and staff will assist the families and friends of the deceased as well as assist in planning the rites or adapting them as needed. Also, they are good resources for liturgical music and planning aids for the Funeral Liturgies.