

urn of the deceased in the home are particularly offensive to the Catholic understanding of the sacredness of the body.

Appropriate Music

The Church in her motherly care has also desired to aid mourners with the use of appropriate musical selections that speak to the different moods of the major celebrations of the OCF. As such, it is best that “favorite songs” that are not of a sacred character, and songs from outside the Catholic tradition be reserved to the Vigil of the Deceased, and that accepted Catholic music be used at the Mass of Christian Burial. It is also permitted that other music which is in keeping with the sentiments of the liturgy may be used at the Rite of Committal.

Memorial Masses

It is the ancient custom of the Church that memorial masses for loved ones be celebrated on or around the date of the anniversary of death. Another custom from the Latin American culture is the Novena of memorial Masses are celebrated on the same date of each month for the first year after death. All Catholics are urged to pray for the dead regularly.



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Serving the People
of God

Catholic Rites For The Dying And The Deceased



St Peter The Apostle Parish
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Basic Policies Regarding Funerals

- *Vigils are held the evening before the funeral, either in the Church or the Funeral Home Chapel.*
 - *Eulogies are read and stories are shared after the homily.*
 - *The rosary is reserved to the Vigil for the Deceased.*
- *Music must reflect the moods of each of the Liturgical celebrations.*
 - *For the vigil, an opening hymn psalm, and closing hymn. Favorite songs can be used during the eulogies.*
 - *For the Mass, Catholic Hymns and Chants*
 - *For the Rite of Committal, generally Catholic Hymns and Chants, but a favorite song can be introduced here, too at the end.*
- *Except for a very serious reason, the three celebrations of the major rites from the Order of Christian Funerals are to be celebrated: Vigil, Mass and Rite of Committal (Burial). The Burial alone may be separated to a later time, but not more than 6 months after death.*
- *If the body of the deceased is cremated, the cremains must be buried integrally in a final resting place in a cemetery. There is to be no reservation from burial of any part of the cremains.*
- *The hymn “In Paradisum” or its English equivalent “May Angels Guide You” should be the final hymn of every funeral. After that, an instrumental postlude is appropriate, but not necessary.*

The Catholic Tradition Meets the Needs of Hurting Families

By means of the funeral rites, it has been the practice of the Church, as a tender mother, not simply to commend the dead to God but also to raise high the hope of its children and to give witness to its own faith in the future resurrection of the baptized with Christ....”

With these words, the Order of Christian Funerals sets out the vision of the celebration of the rites that Catholics celebrate when a beloved family member, a neighbor, a friend passes from this world to the next.

Key to the revised rites is the very human need to not only commemorate the dead, but to speak of the meaning of life and death, and in the Christian Religion in particular the firm hope of reunion with the departed in the Resurrection. As we encounter death, we also encounter our fragile mortality. We question why disease, why death and why separation? We ask “is that all there is?”

Catholic rituals of the care of the sick and dying, and of the dead eloquently speak to these questions with the time-honored words of Scripture and Prayer, that speak of the yearning of the human heart for peace, acceptance and hope while addressing our feelings of anger, sadness, grief, depression and desolation. Furthermore, the ritual aspect of the rites around death assure us that we have truly “done all we could do,” and that we have “done the right thing” by our beloved dead. This brochure is intended to answer questions of what we ought to do for the dying and the dead by bringing the Lord into the very death process and the laying to rest of our loved ones. It is hoped that these guidelines will give the grieving peace.

Before Death

For people whom we know will die soon, we often place them in Hospice care or some other provisions are made to make them comfortable when death is foreseen in the next few months or weeks. This is a good time to contact your local priest to have him come to visit and anoint them and give them communion. It is called “viaticum”—or food for the journey. The follow-up for those who are on a slow decline is to have the Parish send someone to bring weekly Communion, what used to be called “sick calls.” Often times, the hospice social worker will be glad to contact the parish and begin this spiritual care of the dying. If a priest is not available, the communion can be given, and the anointing can follow at the soonest possible convenience.

At some point your loved one will begin what is sometimes called “active dying”. When this moment comes is the time to call the priest to join your family (if possible) for what used to be called the “Last Rites” The sacramental rites for the dying include confession (if the person is conscious) and the Apostolic Pardon for those who have been faithful to the church, the last anointing of the sick to heal the soul, and Communion (again, only if the dying person is conscious). There follows the rites for the commendation of the soul. These prayers prepare the dying person and help the rest of the family to begin the process of saying farewell.

At the point of death

When your loved one dies, it is good again to call the priest or deacon to bless the body and pray with the family before the funeral home is called for the removal. These rites also help the family to begin the grieving that is so necessary for us while situating our feelings in a context of our Catholic faith and our hope of the resurrection. Although not absolutely necessary, these are good things to do in order to set your heart and mind at ease, and to bathe your soul in the consolation of the spiritual aid of prayer. If a priest or clergyman is not available, you can always sprinkle his or her body with holy water and pray the rosary.

The Funeral Rites

The Catholic Order of Christian Funerals (OCF) is celebrated whether the person’s body is buried, or is cremated. The ritual book has two basic divisions, minor rituals and major rituals. The major rituals are the Vigil, the Mass of Christian Burial (Funeral Mass) and the Final Committal (burial). These are the most important rites, and suffice to be able to say “we have done the right thing.”

The Vigil of the Deceased

The Vigil of the Deceased is celebrated most often in the funeral chapel. It consists of readings, prayers, homily, eulogies or storytelling, blessing, and an optional recitation of the rosary. It takes place the evening before the funeral Mass. When crowds will be large, Vigils can be held in the church, and the casket or urn left in the church until the Mass the next day. The theme of this part of the OCF is the life and accomplishments of the deceased person, our memories and our grief and our loss.

The Mass of Christian Burial

This ritual celebrates the Christian Mystery of Hope, properly, and is about Eternal Life and our hope of the resurrection from the dead. This is why eulogies are not permitted during the Mass. It is a solemn liturgy, using the symbols and signs of our faith, the sacraments that describe our faith (holy water, cross, pall, and incense) and reminds us of the heavenly banquet (Eucharist) which the deceased will enter after judgment and any necessary purgation. It ends with the ancient song “May Angels Guide you into Paradise.” which expresses our hope for the deceased.

The Rite of Committal

The procession out of the church, accompanied by the aforementioned chant, brings us to the place of burial, the final resting place to which every person has a right in the Catholic Church; and which every descendant has a right and an obligation to visit to pray for the soul of their beloved dead. The theme of this portion of the

OCF is that of “farewell” and parting for the last time until the resurrection. The ritual continues with a verse from scripture, the blessing of the ground (if it has not been blessed) the committal and prayers over the place of burial. Often family members throw in a hand-full of dirt or place flowers on the casket before departing.

Foreign Customs And The Sacredness Of The Body

The symbols and rites of the OCF are fully able and most appropriate to honor the deceased and to speak to the needs of those who remain after a loved one has died. The Church in her wisdom has clarified and honed to a fine polish her rites in this regard. Many times, though well-intentioned, people try to bring into the Church’s celebration things that do not harmonize with what we believe. These should be avoided in order to let the rites speak clearly and in an uncluttered environment.

As Catholics we consider the body, a creation of God, and really God’s own property in the end, to be a sacred thing that should be honored in life and in death. In death we use incense, a traditional sign of honor, to bless the casket or burial urn at the beginning and end of the Funeral Mass. Then we bless the ground or mausoleum or columbarium that will be the final resting place of our beloved dead and with ceremony, bury them integrally to await the resurrection.

Some practices have been allowed in other churches and religions because their religion lacks sufficient symbolic language to celebrate the dead and to honor the thoughts and feelings of those who remain. These have of late been presented for introduction into the Catholic Burial rites. Some such practices include the retaining some cremains in a vial to be worn, or pressing cremains into a gemstone to be worn, or keeping the