

Dear Parishioners,

Catholic parishes generally have their fair number of funerals each year. Priests are acutely aware of our need to help comfort families and to provide the necessary spiritual guidance at this most difficult time.

There are a few trends in society, however, that seem to be all too frequent today and I think they need to be addressed. First, **the norm for a Catholic funeral is Mass**. It is important that we focus on the action of His, Death and Resurrection. Mass itself is the most perfect prayer and sacrifice that can be offered for our loved ones. **Nothing** is more efficacious. It is a re-presentation of Christ's Salvific Act. The funeral rite contains such rich symbolism reminding us of our connection to Baptism (the placing of the funeral pall, the sprinkling of Holy Water, and the presence of the lit Paschal candle). We also can receive the and Blood of Jesus to strengthen us.

Sometimes those who are not familiar with the proper Catholic protocol might encourage having just a service at the funeral home. While the service may bring some comfort to the family, theologically, **it is not the same as having a Mass offered for that person**. Please think of the eternal soul of the deceased and have their funeral rites take place during a Mass. It is also important to pray and to have Masses offered for the soul of the deceased. While flowers are a nice gesture, a Mass for the deceased is much more beneficial.

Second, many families are opting to have a viewing or visitation in church prior to the funeral Mass instead of having it in the funeral home. Many parishes have changed their policies and now refuse to allow viewings in church. Perhaps the main reason for this is because people have seemingly forgotten that when they are coming to pay their respects, **they are in church**. A church viewing is quite different from a viewing in the funeral home and people should behave accordingly. The Blessed Sacrament, our Lord, is present in the Tabernacle. The same reverence and respect that should be exhibited on Saturday evening, Sunday morning, or whenever you enter church for Mass or for prayer and reflection, **should be in place when entering church prior to a Funeral**. I reluctantly still allow viewings / visitations in church. I have to say that after seeing **coolers** with sodas, sandwiches, and water in the church while cards were being played in the chapel during a recent viewing, I am praying hard over how to handle this in the future.

Third, it specifically stated in the funeral ritual that **there is never to be a eulogy** during the funeral Mass (*Order of Christian Funerals*, General Introduction #27). Over time, this practice has found its way into our liturgies and become a somewhat "acceptable" practice. However, the funeral Liturgy should be **more about the action of Christ** than a tribute to a deceased person. The place such as a eulogy or words of remembrance is either at the funeral home, graveside (weather permitting), or at the meal served after the funeral. (At a family's request, I have reluctantly permitted someone to say a few words **prior to Mass** so that it was not actually part of the Liturgy itself.)

Personally, I have had some bad experiences with eulogies over the years. They range from a minister of another denomination beginning to "preach" at the funeral Mass and to contradict Catholic teaching, to being so emotionally distraught that they could not finish what they wanted to say, to using biblical references to Christ and applying them directly to the deceased person. The bishops, priests or deacons are the only ones "ordained" to speak on behalf of the Church from the pulpit. We have a duty to bring people to Christ to and adore **Him**. The liturgy is not about "praising" and "canonizing" the deceased no matter how good the person was.

Fourth, the choice of music should always be religious in nature and appropriate for a church. Secular music (popular or sentimental) is never appropriate during Mass. I remember one instance when I had to explain why Frank Sinatra's "*I Did It My Way*," was not appropriate, nor was it theologically acceptable during a funeral.

Finally, since there are more and more cremations taking place these days, I remind those who choose this option what the Catholic funeral rite tells us about the proper placement of the ashes or *cremains*:

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, and 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* (*Order of Christian Funerals*, #417).

Although the Church earnestly recommends the pious custom of burying the bodies of the dead be observed, it does not however, forbid cremation unless it has been chosen for reasons which are contrary to Christian teaching. **Cremated remains are the body of the deceased in a changed form. We should honor them as we honor the body.** They must be reverently buried or entombed in a place reserved for the burial of the dead.

Bishop Sullivan reminded me at my installation Mass of my role as the "chief teacher" of the parish. I hope that with this explanation, I am being faithful to this task and *pastorally sensitive* as well.

May Saint Michael the Archangel protect, defend, guide, and intercede for us always!

Fr. Larry