

Saint James Parish

CATHOLIC FUNERALS: FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

It is our privilege to help you at this difficult yet sacred time. We recognize that when a loved one is in the last stages of life or has died, the passing is often accompanied by profound sorrow and distress. At the same time, the passing of a loved one can be a time of deeper connection with Christ, who takes us beyond death to eternal life. We hope the following Q & A provides you the basic information you need to begin making funeral plans and helps you better understand what happens in Catholic funerals.

OVERVIEW OF THE FUNERAL RITES

1. *How many parts make up the funeral rites?*

There are three main parts: 1) the **Vigil**, 2) the **Funeral Liturgy** (with or without Mass), and 3) the **Rite of Committal**. Beside these, other rites are provided, e.g., prayers just after death, prayers at the beginning of a visitation, etc.

2. *How best can families prepare for these rites?*

Family and friends may and should actively participate in planning these rites. Such working together can aid in the grieving process. There are many options in the rituals that provide for a variety of approaches. The final wishes of the deceased are to be respected to the extent possible. When the deceased is first transferred to a funeral home, the funeral director will arrange a time for the family to meet. At that meeting, the family and funeral director will discuss funeral options and possible times for the services. The director will then contact the parish to confirm if that time is available, or if other suitable options might be available.

3. *May any of the rites be omitted?*

Since the three rites flow one into another and provide a time of consolation for family members and friends through the liturgy, it seems best to use all three rites.

4. *When should the priest be notified?*

The preference is always to contact the priest before the death, so that the priest can provide the Sacrament of Anointing while the person is still alive. If this is not possible, then the parish priest should be notified of a death as soon as possible. Please call the parish office at 304-725-5558 and tell the receptionist that you are calling to begin the process of planning a funeral. You will then be connected with the priest or parish pastoral staff person who will be there to assist you.

PRAYER VIGIL

5. *What is the difference between a Vigil and a visitation?*

The visitation is simply a gathering of friends who wish to view or be present with the remains of the deceased and share remembrances with the family. A Vigil is a simple Liturgy of the Word of God and is held during a visitation. Should a visitation in church immediately precede a Funeral Mass, the Vigil is not used.

6. *Where should a Vigil be held?*

The Order of Christian Funerals allows for the Vigil to be held in various places: in the home of the deceased, in a funeral home, in a nursing home, or in the parish church, but not directly preceding the Funeral Mass. This service is about fifteen minutes in length and is usually held at the mid point in the period of visitation.

7. *Is the recitation of the Rosary permitted?*

The Vigil is the official prayer for the deceased. However, the recitation of the Rosary is permitted, if the family requests that it be included, at the closing of the Vigil.

8. *What opportunities are present to share memories?*

The Vigil and the visitation are appropriate times for family and friends to share stories and remembrances of the deceased.

THE FUNERAL LITURGY

9. *When may Funeral Masses be celebrated?*

Generally, Funeral Masses are celebrated on weekdays, at a time when most people can attend, and usually in the parish church where the community gathers for Sunday Eucharist. They may be celebrated on any day except Sundays, Holy Days, and the Easter Triduum.

10. *What forms are possible for a Funeral Liturgy?*

Two forms are possible: 1) a Funeral Mass can be celebrated with the body (the preferred way), with cremated remains, or as a memorial Mass without the body; 2) a simple Liturgy of the Word may also be arranged.

11. *What choices can I make?*

More than you think. Scripture readings may be selected from those recommended by the Church. Families may also be involved at various places during the Funeral Mass: placing of the pall, First Reading & Second Reading, and Offertory Procession.

12. *How do I plan a funeral?*

When you meet with a Priest or a member of the Parish staff, they will walk you through the options available for the liturgy and will give you a selection of Scripture readings from which to choose.

13. *Who will help me/us plan a funeral?*

The priest or other members of the pastoral staff will be happy to help.

14. *Can I have a poem or favorite song or words of remembrance?*

There are opportunities for personal choices in each of the three stages of the funeral. Poems and favorite songs often fit best in the prayer Vigil, the graveside service, and at any reception held after the services. Songs during the Funeral Mass are of a religious nature only. The whole congregation should be able to participate in the music chosen. The music will be prepared with the help of our Director of Music [liturgy@stjameswv.org]

J. Care should be taken that the words of any material are in keeping with the rich musical tradition of Catholicism.

15. *Can a flag be substituted for the funeral pall over the casket during the Funeral Mass?*
No. The casket is covered with the white pall as a reminder one's baptism. The flag may be placed on the casket at the Vigil or the graveside. Within the Funeral Mass, the flag is removed at the beginning of the service and returned at the conclusion of Mass, remaining there until interment.

THE RITE OF COMMITTAL

16. *What is the Rite of Committal?*

After the Funeral Mass or Funeral Liturgy without Mass, the body is taken to the cemetery for burial. The Rite of Committal, or final farewell, is prayed at that time.

17. *Where should the Rite of Committal take place?*

Ordinarily, the Rite of Committal takes place at the graveside. According to the ritual it may take place completely in the church, completely in the cemetery, or partly in the church and partly in the cemetery. The prayer of committal recognizes that the place of interment or entombment has been transformed by means of Christ's death and resurrection.

18. *Must a Catholic be buried in a Catholic cemetery?*

Circumstances determine where a Catholic may be buried - either in a Catholic cemetery, if one is available, in a Catholic columbarium, or in another cemetery. The nearest Catholic cemetery is Saint Peter Cemetery in Harpers Ferry. Saint Leo Cemetery in Inwood has an above-ground columbarium.

CREMATION

19. *Can Catholics be cremated?*

Yes, the bodies of Catholics may be cremated. Cremation is permitted as long as the body is not cremated as a protest against the Christian belief in the resurrection of the dead. Although cremation is now permitted by the Church, it does not enjoy the same value as burial of the body since the human body is inextricably associated with the human person. However, the cremated remains of a body should be treated with the same respect given to the human body from which they come. When the choice has been made to cremate a body, it is recommended that cremation take place after the Funeral Liturgy.

20. *What kind of container is appropriate?*

Worthy containers, such as the classic funeral urn, are appropriate. Keeping the ashes in pieces of jewelry, statuary, or other objects are unacceptable practices. 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 is not the reverent disposition that the Church requires. It is a sign of hope to keep the ashes together.

21. *Where are the ashes to be placed?*

The ashes must be placed in a grave or niche in a columbarium.

22. *May the ashes be present for a Funeral Mass?*

It is strongly preferable for the body to be present for the Funeral Mass. After the Mass the body may be cremated. If this is not possible, the ashes should be present. If the ashes are not present, the Funeral Mass prescribed in the ritual is not celebrated. In that case a Memorial Mass may be appropriate.

23. *May the ashes be mixed with cremated remains of other individuals, pets, or other objects?*

No. This practice has never been acceptable.

SOME QUESTIONS

24. *Can a stillborn baby have a funeral?*

Yes, the Church provides a special service within its collection of liturgies **Order of Christian Funerals**. It can also be adapted for parents who have suffered a miscarriage. At our cemetery of Saint Peter (Harpers Ferry) we also have a spot near the statue of the Blessed Virgin Mary for the remains of children stillborn or miscarried.

25. *May persons pre-plan their funeral?*

Yes, people may plan their Funeral Liturgy and make their wishes clear ahead of time, just as with a funeral home.

26. *May a person donate organs?*

The donation of one's organs has become commonplace and is commendable. The donation of the entire body for scientific study is also permitted. In these instances, the proper disposition of the body is to be done according to accepted practices.

27. *Can bequests be made to benefit a parish?*

Because of their commitment to a beloved Parish, many people choose to name it in their will. If they would like the parish to benefit from their generosity, the bequest should be worded to clearly state this request.

28. *What about Mass intentions for the deceased?*

Praying for the deceased is an important act of faith and connects us to those who have preceded us in death. We may wish to request a Mass be offered for a loved one's intention, or we may specify an amount in our will to be offered for our own intention. Simply contact the parish office; a suggested donation of \$10 is generally made to cover the Mass. You will then receive a small card that you can then present to the family acknowledging the gift of the Mass.

29. *May Catholics who have been divorced or remarried outside the Church or who have committed suicide be buried with a Catholic ceremony?*

Yes. Such circumstances of themselves do not exclude the possibility of a Catholic burial.

30. *What does it cost to have a funeral in our parish?*

At Saint James, there is never a cost associated with a funeral. A voluntary donation may be made to the parish and to the musicians. Such donation is at the will of the family and is never required.