

Funeral Planning (edited 08/18/05)

Planning for a funeral is not something most of us look forward to with joy and anticipation. However, we Christians know that death awaits us, not as a tragic ending, but as a passage into a new and indescribably marvelous life with God. As St. Paul says: "What eye has not seen, and ear has not heard, and what has not entered the human heart, what God has prepared for those who love him" (1 Cor 2:9-10).

So, while planning a funeral may not make our list of favorite pastimes, most of us inevitably think about it from time to time. Have you ever heard a song at Mass and said to yourself, "I want that sung at my funeral!"? Or have you heard a Scripture reading at a funeral that you knew in your heart was one you wanted proclaimed at your own funeral or perhaps that of a loved one? Have you thought about cremation? Or even the location of burial? In this day and age of people moving from state to state, often one of the most difficult decisions is where to be buried. Do your loved ones know your wishes? Do you know theirs? It is important to communicate your funeral ideas both informally and perhaps formally before a bereaved family is forced to make a great deal of quick decisions in a time of grief and stress.

Planning a funeral involves both contacting the funeral home for burial arrangements and contacting the church to arrange the funeral Mass. When a loved one dies, those two phone calls set the funeral process in motion.

A funeral home that handles the vast majority of funerals at SS Peter and Paul is:

Hughart & Beard Funeral Home

2504 S. Virginia Street

Hopkinsville, KY 42240

270-886-9451

While the funeral home handles many of the details of the burial, the funeral liturgy itself should be planned with the parish (270-885-8522). You will meet with a priest and/or the director of liturgy and music to plan the Mass and the activities based at the parish, including arrangements for a funeral luncheon, which is routinely provided by the parish, if you wish. More information on planning the liturgy can be found here.

Advance Planning

"Soon 'ah will be done a-with the troubles of the world; I'm goin' to live with God!"

~refrain from an African-American spiritual

Advance planning can be done years in advance, when death is not at all expected soon, or it can be done in cases of terminal illness or aging. Every funeral home offers advance planning counseling and sales, and in most cases advance planning arrangements are transferable in case you move.

As for the funeral Mass, advance planning can be a great source of inspiration and comfort. Reading and studying the Scripture texts the Church offers for the funeral Mass offers hope and peace for those anticipating death. Many people who are nearing death actually want to take part in selecting the Scripture readings, music, and other details of their funeral liturgy, but some are reluctant to bring it up with loved ones, for fear others will think they've "given up." Raising the subject of funeral planning for the first time can be awkward, but usually starting to talk about the funeral openly is a welcome subject.

Short-term Planning

Many times, of course, advance planning cannot be done, or has not been done. In this event, contact the funeral home (270-886-9451) and the parish office (270-885-8522) to initiate the process. You will meet with the funeral directors to plan the details at the mortuary, and you will meet with a priest and/or the director of liturgy and music to plan the details of the funeral Mass and other rites. We will do our best to offer prayer, comfort, and support in your time of grief.

Catholic Funeral Rites

"Christians celebrate the funeral rites to offer worship, praise, and thanksgiving to God for the gift of a life which has now been returned to God, the author of life and the hope of the just. The Mass, the memorial of Christ's death and resurrection, is the principal celebration of the Christian funeral." ~*General Introduction to the Order of Christian Funerals*, §5

When a loved one dies, those left behind are filled with the conflicting emotions of intense sorrow and grief, coupled with Christian joy and thankfulness that the suffering is over and everlasting life in heaven is beginning. The Roman Catholic funeral rites offer a beautiful, profound journey through grief and loss to the joy of anticipation of the resurrection of the dead.

The Catholic funeral rites consist of three components:

1. The Vigil for the Deceased
 - Usually the evening before the burial
 - Usually at the funeral home
 - The normative format is the readings and prayers that make up the official Vigil for the Deceased, but other options are possible:
 - Liturgy of the Word
 - Evening Prayer from the Liturgy of the Hours (Office of the Dead)
 - Rosary and prayers
 - This is the best time for a eulogy or shared remembrances
2. The Mass of Christian Burial
 - Celebrated at the parish church, unless special permission is granted by the priest to hold it at a funeral chapel
 - This is the central celebration of the Christian funeral
 - Due to the nature of the liturgy, eulogies are discouraged at the Mass itself. They are much better done at the Vigil for the Deceased the evening before or at the funeral luncheon. In some circumstances a eulogy at the funeral Mass may be permitted, but there must be only one, and it must be less than 5 minutes. See more detailed guidelines below.
3. The Rite of Committal

- These final prayers before burial are normally prayed at the graveside, as we commit our loved one to the hands of God.

A more detailed summary of these rites can be found at this link:

<http://new.cemeteries.org/services0019.asp>

When you meet with the parish priest or liturgy director, you will receive a copy of the book *Through Death to Life* by Fr. Joseph Champlin (Ave Maria Press). For advance planning, you can also get a copy of this book at the parish office. It contains all the suggested options for Scripture readings and prayers, as well as a handy tear-out planning sheet for you to submit to the priest or liturgy director.

Here are some of the choices you'll need to communicate to the parish:

1. Scripture readings (more information below)
2. Music choices (more information below)
3. Is there a visiting priest?
4. Do you want a funeral luncheon?
 - Routinely provided by a group of parish volunteers (no charge)
 - Usually held in the Parish Hall Gym, immediately following the burial at the cemetery
5. Would you like the parish to prepare the printed program for the Mass? (no charge) If so, we'll need the following information.
 - Exact dates of birth and death
 - If you wish, you can submit a favorite photo to be used on the front cover of the program
 - The names of the following:

Readers of first and second reading

Readers of General Intercessions (Prayers of the Faithful) (if desired, the priest or cantor can read these)

Pall bearers

Gift bearers (to present the bread and wine at offertory)

Altar servers (if applicable; normally these are provided by the parish)

Extraordinary Eucharistic Ministers, if communion under both species is desired. These must be officially-commissioned Ministers, and at least one must be a member of the parish. Upon request, the parish will recruit Minister for you.

Scripture Readings

The Catholic Church offers a wide selection of Scripture readings for the funeral rites. You will likely find excellent readings from among this list, but you may choose another Scripture reading if another passage is particularly appropriate for you or your loved one.

You will need to choose 4 scripture readings for the Mass (see the book *Through Death to Life*):

1. First Reading from the Old Testament (or from Acts or Revelation in Easter Season)
2. Responsorial Psalm from the Book of Psalms
3. Second Reading from the New Testament Epistles
4. Gospel Reading

The first and second readings may be proclaimed by a family member or friend. The readers should have a good grasp of the principles of proclaiming the Word of God in public. Be sure to give them a copy of the reading in advance, and encourage them to practice the reading at the ambo (lectern) in church to get the feel of the acoustics and the microphone.

The responsorial psalm should preferably be sung by the cantor, but it can be recited if necessary.

All the passages listed below from the Order of Christian Funerals can be found in the translation used for liturgy at [USSCB](#).

1. First Reading from the Old Testament (Pages 37-46 of *Through Death to Life*. *Denotes most often-used readings.)
 - 2 Maccabees 12:43-46
 - Job 19:1, 23-27a
 - *Wisdom 3:1-9 (or shorter version - Wisdom 3:1-6, 9)
 - Wisdom 4:7-15
 - *Isaiah 25:6a, 7-9
 - *Lamentations 3:17-26
 - Daniel 12:1-3

During the Easter Season (Easter to Pentecost) one of the following is used instead of a passage from the Old Testament.

- Acts 10:34-43 (or shorter version Acts 10:34-36, 42-43)
 - *Revelation 14:13
 - Revelation 20:11-21:1
 - *Revelation 21:1-5a, 6b-7
2. Responsorial Psalm (usually sung by the cantor) (Pages 47-56 of *Through Death to Life*. *Denotes most often-used readings.) Please note that these psalms are an excellent source of music for all the parts of the Mass. Any one of these psalms can be used as a song for the opening procession, presentation of gifts, communion song, or closing song.
- *Psalm 23:1-3, 4, 5, 6
 - *Psalm 25:6 and 7b, 17-18, 20-21
 - *Psalm 27:1, 4, 7 and 8b and 9a, 13-14
 - Psalm 42:2, 3, 5cdef; 43:3, 4, 5
 - *Psalm 63:2, 3-4, 5-6, 8-9
 - *Psalm 103:8 and 10, 13-14, 15-16, 17-18
 - *Psalm 116:5, 6, 10-11, 15-16ac
 - Psalm 122: 1-2, 4-5, 6-7, 8-9
 - *Psalm 130: 1-2, 3-4, 5-6ab, 6c-7, 8
 - Psalm 143: 1-2, 5-6, 7ab and 8ab, 10
3. Second Reading from the New Testament Epistles (Pages 57-67 of *Through Death to Life*. *Denotes most often-used readings.)
- Romans 5:5-11
 - Romans 5:17-21
 - Romans 6:3-9 (or shorter version: Rom 6:3-4, 8-9)
 - Romans 8:14-23
 - *Romans 8:31b-35, 37-39
 - Romans 14:7-9, 10c-12
 - *1 Corinthians 15:20-28 (or shorter version: 1 Cor 15:20-23)
 - 1 Corinthians 15:51-57
 - *2 Corinthians 4:14-5:1
 - 2 Corinthians 5:1, 6-10
 - Philippians 3:20-21
 - 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18
 - 2 Timothy 2:8-13

- *1 John 3:1-2
 - 1 John 3:14-16
4. Gospel Reading (read by the priest or deacon only) (Pages 70-88 of *Through Death to Life*.)

*Denotes most often-used readings.)

- *Matthew 5:1-12a
- *Matthew 11:25-30
- Matthew 25:1-13
- Matthew 25:31-46
- Mark 15:33-39; 16:1-6 (or shorter version - Mk 15:33-39)
- Luke 7:11-17
- Luke 12:35-40
- Luke 23:33, 39-43
- Luke 23:44-46, 50, 52-53; 24:1-6a (or shorter version – Lk 23:44-46, 50, 52-53)
- Luke 24:13-35 (or shorter version - Lk 24:13-16, 28-35)
- John 5: 24-29
- *John 6:37-40
- *John 6:51-59
- *John 11:17-27 (or shorter version: John 11:21-27)
- John 11:32-45
- *John 12:23-28 (or shorter version: John 12:23-26)
- *John 14:1-6
- John 17:24-26
- John 19:17-18, 25-39

Music for the Funeral Mass

The music for the funeral liturgy, as the music at all Catholic liturgy, should encourage the participation of all those present in sung prayer.

Eulogies

A eulogy, or tribute to the deceased, has in the past often been inserted into the funeral Mass, but current liturgical guidelines strongly discourage this practice.

The Order of Christian Funerals (the Catholic Church document governing Catholic funerals) is quite clear that "a brief homily should be given at the funeral liturgy, but never any kind of eulogy" to replace the homily (OCF #141). This does not mean that the deceased cannot be spoken about in the homily, but that the Word

of God must be primary. The homilist (priest or deacon) speaks the scriptural word that helps the assembly understand that the mystery of the death and resurrection of Jesus is operative in the life and death of the deceased.

In certain cases, a remembrance by a family member or friend during the funeral Mass may be allowed, either at the beginning of Mass or after communion. This must be arranged with the priest a day or two ahead of time, not minutes before Mass.

If permission is granted for a remembrance or eulogy to be given at Mass, the following guidelines MUST be observed:

1. Only one person may speak (unless translation to another language is needed for the benefit of the assembly)
2. The remembrance should be spoken from the cantor stand, not the ambo (lectern), which is reserved for the reading of and commentary on Scripture. Also, the cantor stand offers more control over volume than the ambo, which is essential when the speaker is under stress.
3. The remembrance must be brief; no more than 5 minutes
4. The remembrance should be well prepared in advance so that it is focused and stays within the 5-minute time limit. If possible, a copy should be given to the priest in time to review it before the liturgy.

These guidelines are not meant to squelch remembrance or tribute, but past experience has taught that eulogies are the "wild card" most prone to disaster, with some rambling on for 45 minutes or more, some nearly unintelligible through tears or mumbling, and others used more as a soap box for cult theology than a remembrance of the dead. (All of these cases have indeed happened in the past at OLMC, and nobody wants them to happen to you!)

A eulogy or eulogies are much more appropriate and successful when presented at the prayer vigil the evening before the funeral, not at the Mass itself. Families are strongly encouraged to utilize this option.

Summary

The Catholic Church has two thousand years' experience escorting the deceased into the Kingdom of Heaven, and just as much experience consoling those who remain behind. Holy Mother Church's funeral rites offer an unparalleled avenue for remembrance and worship through the throes of grief into the comfort

and joy of the resurrection. Prayerful preparation and planning of the funeral liturgy will help you and your loved ones deal successfully and gracefully with the ultimate rite of passage through death to life. Amen.