

Our Involvement in the Funeral Mass

Every mourner will be “involved” in the Funeral Mass by their presence and their prayers, and by their listening to the words that are proclaimed and spoken during the Mass. There are certain elements, however, that allow for greater involvement should a family so wish.

The Church does not want to impose on families at a difficult time, so your involvement in all these elements is entirely optional. The Church has ministers who will be able to carry out all these functions if family members do not wish to do so.

Carrying the Coffin

Occasionally family members will wish to share this task. It should be arranged with the Funeral Director.

Placing of the Pall

On arriving in Church, family members may assist the priest in placing the Funeral Pall on the coffin: up to four people may be involved with this.

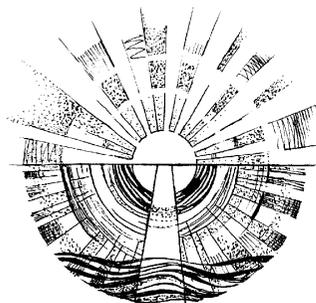
Scripture Reading

If there is someone in your family who is a church reader, or who would be able to proclaim the Scripture Reading(s) or Intercessions, you may wish them to do so at the Funeral Mass.

Presenting the Gifts

If there are other members of the family who wish to be involved at a Funeral Mass, you may feel it is suitable for them to bring up the gifts of bread and wine to the priest at the appropriate moment.

Remembrance of the Deceased



After communion someone may wish to speak in memory of the deceased. This should always be discussed with the priest who will preside at the Funeral Mass.

It may be that you (or another member of your family) would like to say something, but feel unable to stand up in Church and do so; in this case, please feel free to write your words down, so that the priest can read them on your behalf. If you require help in writing something, the priest will be glad to assist you in this.

Understanding the Rites of the Catholic Church

The Funeral Mass

The Purpose of a Funeral Mass

In the Catholic Church, a Funeral Mass serves several purposes. The Church offers prayers for the soul of the one who has died, asking God to “open the gates of paradise” to them, and to grant them forgiveness for any sins they may have committed.

In offering these prayers as part of the Mass, we make them part of the offering Jesus made to God his Father on the cross, and we come into His presence.

The Funeral Mass, while primarily offered for the benefit of the deceased, is also for the benefit of the bereaved. The Scriptural Readings and the priest’s homily are to strengthen the faith of the mourners, helping them to believe in God’s promises; by this they can offer comfort in a difficult time.



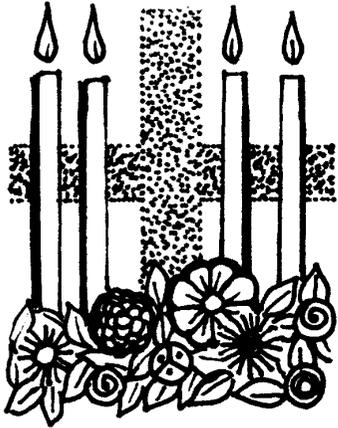
While praying for the deceased and comforting the bereaved, the Funeral Mass also offers people the opportunity to say farewell to a loved one—a difficult thing, since no one ever welcomes this farewell. For this reason, as well as the family and close friends, other friends and acquaintances, and indeed members of the Parish will attend a Funeral Mass to show their respect, offer their condolences and join in the prayers.

A Funeral Mass is focussed on two things: the person who has died and the “Paschal Mystery” of Jesus Christ—his death and resurrection. We will remember the deceased as a member of the family of the Church, who received eternal life when they were baptised, as well as remembering them as part of their own family and circle of friends.

This booklet describes some of the main elements of the Catholic Funeral Mass, and some of the choices that are available to families.

Key Elements in the Funeral Mass

Welcome of the Deceased



At the beginning of the Funeral Mass, we welcome the body of the one who has died into the Church. The priest will greet the coffin and the mourners at the door of the Church, and bless it with holy water. This harks back to the very first time the deceased entered Church—on the day of their baptism. On arriving in Church, we can “vest” or “dress” the coffin with symbols of the Catholic Faith, to acknowledge that this person was a member of the Church. First the coffin may be draped with the *Funeral Pall*, a white cloth which is placed on the coffin in memory of the white garments worn at baptism. Family members sometimes help to place the *Funeral Pall*.

Then the *Book of Gospels* and the *Cross* are placed on the coffin with appropriate prayers. Finally the *Easter Candle* is placed near the coffin, as a sign of the light of Christ shining on our beloved brother or sister who has died.

Readings from Scripture

In every Catholic service one of the most important features is listening to readings from the Bible—what we call the *Liturgy of the Word* (of God). Rather than just using our own words at the difficult time of bereavement, we also turn to the Word of God to see what hope God offers us. There will always be at least two readings, one from the Gospel and the other from either the Old or New Testament. After the readings the priest will preach the *Homily*, which will try to open up the biblical readings and apply them to the person we are praying for and the situation of the Funeral.

Celebration of the Eucharist and Holy Communion

After the Liturgy of the Word, we move to the altar, to remember the Last Supper of Jesus. We offer gifts of bread and wine, which the priest will pray over, just as Jesus did with his disciples. The Catholic Church believes that Jesus really gave his Body and Blood to his disciples, and he does the same for us today. When the priest uses his words “*This is my Body, this is my Blood*”, the bread changes into the Body of Christ and the wine changes into His precious Blood.

We always treat these with the utmost reverence, and ask that others, even if not of our faith, show similar respect. This is the real presence of Jesus, Son of God, who comes to be with us in this moment of grief and mourning.

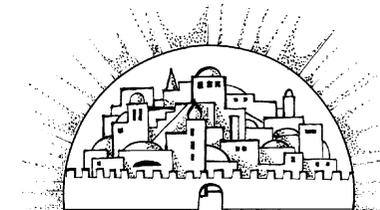
His gift of his Body and Blood are shared in Holy Communion: we believe that sharing in communion is a sign of our unity in the Church—for this reason we do not believe that we can share communion yet with members of different Churches. Nevertheless, non-Catholics will be invited to receive a blessing at the time of Holy Communion if they wish.

Remembrance of the Deceased

After communion, and before the Final Farewell, there is a moment when someone may speak briefly in memory of the deceased. This should be a short reflection, which helps everyone in Church to offer their prayers and thoughts for the one who has died, and their family. It may take the form of memories of that person’s life or perhaps a prayer or poem that means a lot to the family. Whatever is read, it should obviously be suitable for use in Church and as part of the Mass.

Commendation and Farewell

After this the Church says farewell to the deceased, using the symbols of *Holy Water* and *Incense*: Holy Water remembers baptism once more; incense is burned in Church for those things which are most special and sacred, and incensing the coffin honours the body of the one who has died. The priest will then offer the *Prayer of Commendation*, which asks God to welcome our departed brother or sister into Paradise. After this we will make our way out of Church to the place of Committal.



Hymns and other Music

Sacred music is important in our celebrations in the Catholic Church, since it adds solemnity and a sense of celebration to our rites. It will be normal to have some singing at a Funeral Mass, and the bereaved will be consulted about the choice of hymns for the Funeral. It should be noted, however, that we only use “religious” texts and hymns in Church—secular music does not have a place in the Mass, and should be used at some other occasion—such as the wake or reception after the Funeral.