

**Frequently Asked Questions about Funerals – updated 5/27/20**

**What is the purpose of the Funeral Liturgy?**

Because of our belief not only in the immortality of the soul, but also in the resurrection of the body, the Church professes hope in the face of death, and acts with charity in the funeral rites. The Church provides a number of prayers for the faithful to offer both to accompany the dying of a loved one and to strengthen our faith upon their death. Through private prayer and public funeral rites, we strengthen our faith and hope, comfort those who mourn, and bury the bodily remains of the deceased with care befitting what was the Temple of the Holy Spirit. (Taken from the [*USCCB*](http://www.usccb.org/prayer-and-worship/bereavement-and-funerals/index.cfm))

**What do I do when my loved one dies?**

You may contact the church directly or have the funeral home you have chosen call us.  Together we will coordinate the date, time, and location for the Mass or Liturgy outside of Mass.  Completing the planning guide with readings, music, and other details, is helpful to do prior to your meeting with a member of pastoral staff. You can also pre-plan the arrangements when your loved one or you are still alive and able to make those decisions.  Our pastoral staff are happy to assist you with the several choices available for the funeral.

**Burial or Cremation?**

While the Church continues to hold a preference for corporeal burial, cremation has become part of Catholic practice in the United States and the around the world. The Church's reverence and care for the body grows out of a reverence and concern for the person whom the Church now commends to the care of God. This is the body once washed in baptism, anointed with the oil of salvation, and fed with the bread of life. This is the body whose hands clothed the poor and embraced the sorrowing. The human body is so inextricably associated with the human person that it is hard to think of a human person apart from his or her body.

The Church clearly prefers and urges that the body of the deceased be present for the funeral rites, since the presence of the human body better expresses the values which the Church affirms in those rites. For the funeral rites to be accomplished there are three options in order of preference: 1) the body present in a casket for the funeral Mass, then buried afterward; 2) the body present in a casket for the funeral Mass, then cremated afterward with inurnment as soon as possible; 3) cremated remains present for the funeral Mass, then inurned as soon as possible afterward.

Cremated remains are to be treated with the same reverence as the body and should be inurned in a cemetery. They are not to be kept in one’s home, and never are they to be divided, scattered, or made into another object such as jewelry.

**What are the options for a Funeral Liturgy?**

The funeral rites are meant to be accomplished in three parts: the vigil, the liturgy, and the committal. The vigil service occurs at the end of visiting hours at the funeral home the evening before the liturgy. It is a time for scripture, prayer, and reflection about the deceased – a beautiful ritual to close the evening and prepare for the funeral liturgy the next morning. Sometimes a rosary service is provided in addition or on its own.

The Mass of Christian Burial is the preferred liturgy. This may take place at the church or at a Catholic cemetery chapel. It contains the Liturgy of the Word, Liturgy of the Eucharist, and the Rite of Final Commendation. A Funeral Liturgy Outside of Mass may also be celebrated. This contains the Liturgy of the Word, prayers, and the Rite of Final Commendation. A priest or deacon may celebrate this liturgy. It can take place in church, at the funeral home, or cemetery chapel. Both should be followed by burial immediately after the liturgy. If the cremation is to happen after the liturgy, the inurnment should occur as soon as possible afterward.

If the body cannot be present due to donation to science or other extenuating circumstances, a memorial Mass can be held with the Rites of Final Commendation and Committal at a later time.

**What are the options for music and readings?**

We have compiled a list of suggested readings based on the Order of Christian Funerals. Apart from the Easter season, one Old Testament Reading, one New Testament reading, and one Gospel is chosen (Easter is New Testament only).

Funeral music should be sacred and focused on the paschal mystery of Christ’s suffering, death, and triumph over death. Secular music is not permitted. Songs may be selected from the list of suggested music or, if not on the list, discussed with the music director. Cantors and musicians are provided through our music director.

**What about a eulogy?**

The Order of Christian Funerals does not allow for a eulogy to take place within the celebration of the funeral liturgy: *A brief homily based on the readings is always given after the gospel reading; but there is never to be a eulogy.* (OCF 27). The Church gathers with the family and friends of the deceased to give praise and thanks to God for Christ's victory over sin and death, to commend the deceased to God's tender mercy and compassion, and to seek strength in the proclamation of the Paschal Mystery. These are accomplished in comforting prayers, rituals, and in a designed “flow” of the liturgy. Adding in a eulogy that may or may not be appropriate (oh the stories we could tell!) and emphasizing the human life rather than pointing to God, when people are in a state of healing and comfort, will disrupt the purpose and benefit of the Mass. A spoken eulogy is best delivered at the visitation and vigil service the evening before or at the luncheon or gathering following the liturgy. Recently families have provided written eulogies or letters to inserted in the program. This is a keepsake that can go with those attending and be a lasting tribute.

**Other Things to Know**

**We have implemented safety guidelines for funerals celebrated during the pandemic based on direction from the diocese. Please review this information sheet and communicate the contents to your family and guests.**

For additional information or questions, please contact Jennifer Rice, pastoral associate, care and consolation at 614.876.1272 ex 227 or jrice@stbrendans.net.