

Planning for a Catholic Funeral

St. Mary Magdalen Parish

At the death of a Christian, whose life of faith was begun in the waters of baptism and strengthened at the Eucharistic table, the Church intercedes on behalf of the deceased because of its confident belief that death is not the end nor does it break the bonds forged in life. The Church also ministers to the sorrowing and consoles them in the funeral rites with the comforting word of God and the sacrament of the Eucharist. (Order of Christian Funerals, #4)

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The 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. (Order of Christian Funerals, #5)

Order of Christians Funerals:

- The Vigil, also known as Wake Service
- Funeral Mass, also known as Mass of Christian Burial
- The Rite of Committal, also known as Burial

The Vigil/Wake Service: The Vigil is a prayer service led by a Priest, a Deacon, or an assigned minister where family and friends gather for the first time after the passing of their loved one to pray for the deceased. It may take place at home, at the funeral home, or at church (but it should not be right before the Funeral Mass). If family and friends would like to, they may speak in remembrance of the deceased before the concluding prayer of the Vigil. Please note that a Rosary may be said before or after the Vigil or at another time, but not in place of the Vigil. (A family member or anyone who knows how to lead the Rosary may assist with leading the Rosary)

Although it can be difficult for some to face the reality of death of our loved one for the first time at the Vigil, "this ritual moment can be a catalyst for the grieving process fostering psychological and spiritual health." (Diocesan Norms)

Funeral Mass/Mass of Christian Burial

The Eucharistic Sacrifice. When the celebration takes place in church the Eucharist is the heart of the Paschal reality of Christian death. In the Eucharist, the Church expresses her efficacious communion with the departed: offering to the Father in the Holy Spirit the sacrifice of the death and resurrection of Christ, she asks to purify his child of his sins and their consequences, and to admit him to the Paschal fullness of the table of the Kingdom. It is by the Eucharist thus celebrated that the community of the faithful, especially the family of the deceased, learn to live in communion with the one who "has fallen asleep in the Lord," by communicating in the Body of Christ of which he is a living member and, then, by praying for him and with him. (Catechism of the Catholic Church, #1689)

The first Mass said for the deceased prior to their burial is the Funeral Mass. A Funeral Mass is said with the presence of the body/cremated remains. A Funeral Mass takes place in the Church sanctuary. Under special circumstance when the body/cremated remains is not present, a Memorial Mass may be celebrated for the deceased.

The two rites included in the Funeral Mass that are not part of the daily/Sunday Mass are the reception of the Body/Cremated remains at the entrance of the church with the family gathered around, and the farewell prayer and incensing at the closing of Mass (after Communion).

In the Diocese of Orlando, no Funeral Mass is said on Sundays, from Holy Thursday to Easter Sunday, and Solemnities of Obligation. A Funeral Liturgy Outside Mass may be celebrated at the funeral home.

The family is encouraged to participate as much as possible in the planning of the Funeral Mass by choosing songs and readings, as well as doing the readings. However, if the family requests, the parish planner can make some or all the choices on behalf of the family.

The Church through its funeral rites commends the dead to God's merciful love and pleads for the forgiveness of their sins. At the funeral rites, especially at the celebration of the Eucharistic sacrifice, the Christian community affirms and expresses the union of the Church on earth with the Church in heaven in the one great communion of saints. Though separated from the living, the dead are still at one with the community of believers on earth and benefit from their prayers and intercession. (OCF, 6)

Therefore, family and the faithful present at Mass are urged to participate in the Eucharist Sacrifice by receiving Communion. A celebrating priest is usually available for the Sacrament of Reconciliation (Confession) before the Funeral Mass begins.

The Rite of Committal/Burial

At the rite of final commendation and farewell, the community acknowledges the reality of separation and commends the deceased to God. In this way it recognizes the spiritual bond that still exists between the living and the dead and proclaims its belief that all the faithful will be raised up and reunited in the new heavens and a new earth, where death will be no more. (OCF, 6)

Normally, the Rite of Committal or Burial is to follow the Funeral Mass. A priest or a deacon may lead the Service. When the Body/Cremated remains is to be transferred to another location, family should contact a parish close to the burial location to request clergy to conduct the Committal Service upon the arrival of the Body/Cremated remains.

The bodies of the dead must be treated with respect and charity, in faith and hope of the Resurrection. The burial of the dead is a corporal work of mercy; it honors the children of God, who are temples of the Holy Spirit. (CCC, #2300)

The Church recommends the pious custom of burying the bodies of the faithful. However, if circumstance does not allow family to keep the custom of burying the body, cremation is permitted. The practice of cremation is not opposed to the Christian Faith. Therefore, the Church is not opposed to it, unless it is done with the explicit intention to contradict the Christian Faith in the resurrection of the Body. The proper and preferred practice of cremation is to, first, celebrate the Funeral Mass with the presence of the body, then cremation takes place afterward. When the cremated remains are ready, the Rite of Committal at the Cemetery or in a columbarium is to be followed. Contact the Parish Office for a minister to lead the service.

The Church continues to recommend that, unless serious reason prevents it, the cremated remains of the deceased be buried in cemeteries or other sacred places. The practice of keeping the cremated remains in private houses and scattering on land or at sea is not permitted.

The process of grieving could be quite difficult and long. Regarding human death and grieving, the wisdom of the Church as expressed in the funeral rites reaches beyond spiritual healing to psychological and biological healings as well. The Order of the Christian Funerals, if rightly appreciated

and followed through, will put both the dead and the survivors on the pathway to healing and freedom.

Planning Steps

What to do when a member in your family passes away

Preplanning: If you want to have your inputs to your own funeral and/or comfort your family at your own passing, Funeral Pre-planning is highly encouraged. It is also a classic spiritual practice to reflect on and be prepared for death and life eternal. To preplan, fill out the Planning Form as much as you can and contact the Parish Office to complete the process. A copy of your complete preplanning form will be kept in the office of the Steward for the Corporal Works of Mercy. A copy should be given to a family member and the funeral home if you bought a package from them.

Planning right before or immediately after the death of a loved one: As soon as the Medical Doctor recommended, or your family receives the news of the death of a loved one, the family should do the followings (regarding funeral rites):

- Call the Parish Office to let us know so we may include the deceased's name in the Sunday's Mass intention. If you have any questions, we could also assist.
- At the same time, search for a funeral home that appreciates the Catholic faith and offer a package that fits your family's financial situation. It would be helpful if you look over the provided guide to become familiar with the Catholic funeral rites before discussing options with the funeral home.
- Once the funeral home works out their details and let you know when the body/cremated remains will be ready for the rites, call the Parish Office to make arrangement for the Funeral Rites.

Parish's Funeral Coordination:

- The Parish Schedule Keeper and the Steward for the Corporal Works of Mercy look for an available date/time of the church sanctuary and confirm the celebrating priest. For this, we need to know when the body/cremated remains will be ready for the rites and at least two preferred dates/times that work best for the family.
- After the Funeral Mass is scheduled in our parish calendar, a funeral planner will contact the family to schedule a meeting in the Parish Office to plan for all the details of the funeral.
- The funeral date/time will also be posted on our parish website after the planning meeting.

Frequently Asked Questions

1. When does St. Mary Magdalen usually have funerals?
At SMM, Funeral Masses are celebrated Monday through Saturday, usually 10am-2pm if the Church has not been scheduled for another event. A Funeral Mass can be celebrated in English or Spanish.
2. Can we celebrate a Funeral Mass at the funeral homes or cemetery chapels? Funeral Mass may not be celebrated in funeral homes or cemetery chapels. A Vigil/Wake may take place at the Funeral Home.
3. Is an eulogy part of the Funeral Mass? No. The proper place for an eulogy is at the Vigil/Wake Service or at the reception. Under special circumstance, with permission and approval of the celebrant priest and pastor, some words of remembrance may be said at Mass but it must be written and the content be brief (2-3 minutes). The message must be sent to the celebrant priest two business days before the Funeral Mass.
4. What are the fees to have a Funeral Mass at St. Mary Magdalen? For everyone: if the family would like to include music in the Funeral Mass, the musician's stipend is mandatory and to be rendered prior to the Funeral Mass. If the (immediate) family or the deceased person is not a registered parishioner, we request an established facility fee contributing to the upkeep of the parish. Nevertheless, we believe that no one should be refused of a funeral because of their financial circumstances.
5. How much should family pay for the clergy's service? There is no fee for the clergy service. However, if the family chooses to make an offering to the priest/deacon, it is acceptable. There is no suggestion/guideline for the donation amount.
6. Do long time parishioners and patrons get special treatment because of their relationship with the parish? When it comes to the dead, we serve everyone alike with the same current practices. We assist as much as we are able to and as our circumstance allows for. Please note that practices from other parishes or from the past have their values only at those places and time. As we respectfully serve the dead according to our faith, we ask families to respect the Catholic Church's teaching regarding the Liturgy and the parish's local customs. As a courtesy to Priests and Staff, please refrain from proposing a "special request."
7. Is the Church facility available for a funeral reception? That varies, depending on the many things going on at the time. Always check with the Parish's Schedule Keeper for details. (Please note: Reception is not part of the Order of the Christian Funerals)
8. Should a family bring the cremated remains in for just a blessing? Funeral mass for deceased Christians is an honorable ancient practice and their cremated remains should be properly interred and a Deacon can be requested for the Committal Service.
9. Notes A family may request:
 - A Mass Program: provide a good profile picture
 - For a Funeral Mass with cremated remains: a small framed picture (<10"/side) and/or a cross on the urn table; a plant flower or flower (<30" in height) in front of the urn table
 - For a Funeral Mass with the body: flowers-one on each front side, more flowers can be placed in the narthex.

**At Mass, nothing is placed on the casket except the pall and maybe a cross or a bible provided by the family so they can have it for a keepsake.

Appendix

Funeral Scripture Readings

Links to readings: the Bible in Spanish--La Biblia de las Americas version

<https://www.biblegateway.com/versions/La-Biblia-de-las-Américas-LBLA/#booklist>

Readings for funeral mass (English): <http://www.usccb.org/prayer-and-worship/bereavement-and-funerals/readings-for-the-funeral-liturgy.cfm>

Anatomical Donations*

The Catholic Church teaches us that we are to honor our bodies; even after death we must treat them with proper respect. We believe that at the end of the world all humans will be raised from the dead and our bodies and souls will be one again.

Donating of Organs to Science

For organ transplant, when donated for scientific research, the body must be treated with proper respect. When the experiment or dissection is complete, then the body should receive a Christian burial. Bodies should only be used when proper consent is given.

Donating of Body to Science

It is permitted to dissect a cadaver, but the medical school has the duty of using cadavers that are ethically received and treated. They must:

- Receive consent to use the bodies of the deceased (keeping the identity of the cadaver anonymous to those who might dissect them.)
- Always treat the bodies with reverence. Upon completion of study, give the bodies (or cremated remains) a Christian burial.

Points of Consideration for the Family

After deciding to donate a body to medical science, the family of the deceased should consider the following:

- Ordinarily a funeral liturgy will be celebrated with the body present before donation of the body to medical science. Consult with the medical school and inquire if this is possible. If the medical school requires immediate possession of the body, a Memorial Mass for the deceased may be celebrated with the family.
- Determine from the medical school how and when transportation to the medical school will take place and who is responsible for transportation costs incurred.
- Upon completion of research, will the medical school return the body or cremated remains to the family for Committal.
- If cremated remains are to be returned to the family, make sure that the medical school agrees that cremation will be an *individual cremation*....not multiple cremations at the same time. How will the cremated remains be returned to the family?
- After cremated remains have been properly returned to the family and a place for interment has been determined, please contact the church office to arrange for Committal of the cremated remains.

*This part is taken from St. Margaret Mary's Funeral Planning Guide, with permission.