



No 1. Death and Christian Hope

The reality of death is something we all face. When a loved one dies we search for words to express what can hardly be spoken aloud. We are confronted by the mystery of death and the fragility of human existence.

As Christians, made one with the risen Christ at Baptism, we believe that death is not the end. Christ has already overcome death and we live in the sure and certain hope that we will pass from death to eternal life with him when we die.

We believe that death is not the end

Christ showed great compassion for those who had died. He wept at the death of his friend Lazarus (Jn 11:33) and restored the life of the young daughter of Jairus (Lk 8:41-56)

Following Christ's example of love, the faith community gathers around grieving family and friends to acknowledge their loss and give comfort in a time of grief and pain. Through their faith and presence, members of the community offer love and support and assist them to prepare the rites of Christian burial.

Christ-like care of those who have lost a loved one is a special ministry

Delegated members of the parish community, after proper discernment and formation, may minister in a particular way to those who grieve. Christ-like care of those who have lost a loved one through death is a ministry which holds a special importance in the Church.

The Church continues to pray for all who have died in Christ because of the communion of all Christ's members with each other in life and death. This brings spiritual aid to the dead and consolation to the living. In the Prayer of the Faithful

on Sundays we pray especially for those who have died.

In recent times, funerals have sometimes focused more on celebrating life rather than acknowledging grief and expressing Christian hope. The Church holds all these three elements as significant and seeks to express them through its ministry to the bereaved and the celebration of the Funeral Rites.

The beautiful liturgy of the Church contains powerful symbols, gestures and actions and may incorporate local religious practices and family traditions. It offers Christian hope and consolation to all who mourn.

The liturgy contains powerful symbols, gestures and actions

When a loved one dies, immediate contact with a member of the parish, especially a priest or pastoral associate, is important. Parish ministers are sensitive to the needs of those who suffer and grieve. They are able to listen, reassure and offer spiritual guidance and support before any final decisions are made about funeral arrangements. It is important that these decisions are made for the spiritual well being of the family.

The period between the time of death and the funeral is difficult

The time between the death of a loved one and the celebration of the funeral rites is one of great difficulty for many families. The prayers and rites of the Church in the *Order of Christian Funerals* may offer consolation for the grieving family and friends at particular times. These may include prayers at the time of death, a vigil at the home of the deceased, the viewing of the body and the accompaniment of the body to the place of burial.

Some commonly asked questions about funerals

Can a non Catholic be buried from a church with the Catholic rites?

Answer: Yes. The rites are for all baptised Christians.

Can a Catholic be cremated?

Answer: Yes.

Can a family member lead any prayers?

Answer: Yes. There are many special prayers which may be prayed by family members and lay ministers.

Are Eulogies allowed?

Answer: Our rites do not use this term. There is an opportunity for a family member to speak in remembrance of the one who has died. It is important that this doesn't take over the liturgy.

Can a priest lead a funeral at a Funeral Home?

Answer: There is always a preference to celebrate the rites in the parish Church. There are certain pastoral circumstances, however, that might make it more appropriate for the funeral to be held in a commercially run chapel.

Can I ask a priest to bury me if I have not been near the church for years?

Answer: Of course.

When do I call a priest or parish representative?

Answer: When a person is gravely ill it is better to make contact with the Church at this time. The Church can continue to assist the family after the loved one has died. When a person has died, directly contact the parish as soon as possible.

How do I decide between Mass and the Liturgy of Christian Burial?

Answer: Talk it over with your priest or parish minister.