



## CHRISTIAN FUNERAL RITES & CREMATION

Guidelines of the Archdiocese of Galveston-Houston

*Excerpts from the Archdiocesan Pastoral Manual  
Policies for the Archdiocese of Galveston-Houston*

### CHRISTIAN FUNERAL RITES

By means of the funeral rites, it is the practice of the Church, as a tender mother, not simply to commend the dead to God, but also to raise high the hope of its children and to give witness to its own faith in the future resurrection of the baptized with Christ.<sup>1</sup>

In the face of death, the Church confidently proclaims that God has created each person for eternal life and that Jesus, the Son of God, by his death and resurrection, has broken the chains of sin and death that bound humanity (OCF, 1).<sup>2</sup>

Christians celebrate the funeral rites to offer worship, praise and thanksgiving to God for the gift of life which has now been returned to God, the author of life and the hope of the just (OCF, 5).

The celebration of the Christian funeral brings hope and consolation to the living. While proclaiming the Gospel of Jesus Christ and witnessing to Christian hope in the resurrection, the funeral rites also recall to all who take part in them God's mercy and judgment and meet the human need to turn always to God in times of crisis (OCF, 7)

- I. All baptized Catholics have the right to an ecclesiastical burial celebrated according to Church law (C 1176.1).
  - A. Catechumens are buried as Christian faithful (OCF 18; C.1183.1).
  - B. Children whose Baptism was intended by their parents, but who died before being baptized, are also to receive Christian burial. (C 1183.2; PP; DP; OCF 18)
- II. Every Christian is free to choose the cemetery of burial or repository for ashes (C 1180).
  - A. The appropriate blessing from the Order of Christian Funerals should be prayed over the place of committal if it has not been already blessed (OCF 207, 218, 405).
  - B. A prayer of praise and thanksgiving is recited over the place of committal if it has already been blessed (OCF 207, 218, 226, 405).
- III. Christian Symbols should be used appropriately at the rites of Christian funerals. These may include an Easter candle, holy water, incense, fresh flowers, the book of the Gospels and/or a cross on the coffin. If a pall is used at funerals in which the coffin

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<sup>1</sup> From the decree promulgating the revised funeral rites by the Congregation For Divine Worship, 1970

<sup>2</sup> Order of Christian Funerals,

has been draped with a flag, the flag should be removed before the pall is placed. Only Christian symbols may rest on or be placed near the coffin during the funeral liturgy. (OCF 35-38)

## LITURGY

The Liturgy for the rites of Christian funerals may take place at several different stations, i.e., the home, the funeral home, the church, the cemetery and/or a chapel. Appropriate rites are provided for each. (OCF 40-49; C.1176.2)

- I. In funerals at funeral homes or cemetery chapels, the Mass is not to be celebrated. The Funeral Liturgy Outside of Mass may certainly be celebrated in a funeral home or at a cemetery (C.1176.2) and the funeral should be recorded in the parish's death or burial register (C.1182).
- II. If the Mass is not celebrated in connection with the funeral rites, it is to be offered, without the body present, either before or after the funeral rites, within a reasonable time (OCF 46).
- III. The celebration of the funeral Mass is forbidden on solemnities of obligation, on Holy Thursday and the Easter Triduum, and on the Sundays of Advent, Lent, and the Easter Season (OCF 178).
- IV. The family of the deceased should be invited to assist in planning the funeral rites and, if possible, should exercise some of the liturgical ministries within the liturgy (OCF 15-17).
- V. Music is integral to the funeral rites and should be chosen with care. Music should be provided for the vigil and funeral liturgy and, whenever possible, for the funeral processions and the rite of committal. (OCF 30-33)

## CREMATION<sup>3</sup>

- I. Catholic teaching stresses the preference for burial or entombment of the body of the deceased. Likewise, the Church clearly prefers that the body of the deceased be present for its funeral rites. (C.1176.3; OCF 19, 413-418)
- II. Those who have chosen cremation may receive a Christian Funeral Rite, unless their choice for cremation reflects a denial of the resurrection of the body or is dictated by anti-Christian motives (OCF 19, 426; C 1176.3).
- III. Because the Church prefers the presence of the body for funeral liturgies, it is recommended that cremation take place following the funeral liturgy. (OCF 413; 418)
- IV. When circumstances prevent the presence of the body at the funeral liturgy, it is appropriate that the cremated remains be present for the full course of the funeral liturgy (Vigil for the Deceased, Funeral Liturgy, Rite of Committal). In the Funeral

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<sup>3</sup> United States Catholic Conference May, 1997 "Reflections on the Body, Cremation and Catholic Funeral Rites"

Liturgy with the cremated remains present, the sprinkling with holy water occurs but the placing of the pall is omitted (OCF 433-434).

- V. The cremated remains should be treated with the same respect given to the corporeal remains of the body. The cremated remains should be entombed in a mausoleum or columbarium; they may also be buried in a common grave in a cemetery. The practices of scattering the remains or keeping them in a home are not the reverent disposition that the Church requires. (OCF 417)

## FUNERAL HOMILIES AND EULOGIES

The rite allows for words of remembrance of the deceased at the vigil and the funeral liturgy, but that should never take the place of the importance of the homily, to proclaim the mystery of the dying and rising of Christ. The funeral homily should be focused on the scripture readings and express the Church's teaching on eternal life. (OCF 27; cf. OCF 6-7; C.1176.2)

Within the Archdiocese of Galveston-Houston, if personal remembrances are to be given, only one person, but certainly not more than two persons, should speak but only for two to three minutes. (Presbyteral Council Minutes 10/00)

They are to occur only at the following times:

- I. At the end of Vigil services: after the closing prayer and before the concluding rite (OCF 80; 96) and/or
- II. At the end of the Funeral Mass: following the Prayer for Communion and prior to the final commendation (OCF,170).
- III. In a Funeral Liturgy Outside of Mass: after the Our Father and prior to the final commendation (OCF, 197).

**Questions:** Contact the Office of Worship, 713-741-8760, [worship1@archgh.org](mailto:worship1@archgh.org), [www.archgh.org/worship](http://www.archgh.org/worship)