

# THE FUNERAL LITURGY

## Reception of the Body in the Church

**Rite of Reception:** The priest greets the family and welcomes the body of the deceased by recalling that on the day of baptism the person was welcomed into the Church and given new life in Christ. The priest reminds all that we have gathered to surround our deceased brother/sister with the Church's prayer and commend him/her to the mercy of God.

**Funeral Pall:** As a sign of the new life of baptism, the casket is covered with the Pall, which is a large white cloth that symbolizes our baptism, when we were clothed with the garment of salvation.

- As the casket is brought into the Church, family members may place the pall over the casket before the priest begins the rite of reception.

**Use of Holy Water:** If holy water will not be used at the conclusion of the Mass, the priest now sprinkles the body with holy water as a further symbol of baptism.

**Entrance Procession:** The priest and assisting ministers precede the coffin and the mourners into the church. During the procession a psalm, song, or responsory is sung.

## Liturgy of the Word

**Readings:** In consultation with the priest, the family may select the scripture readings. One or two readings precede the Gospel. A psalm is sung after the first reading. The Gospel is always the last reading and is read by the priest or deacon. Only readings from the Bible are used. [*A loose-leaf book containing all the readings is available to the family for selecting the readings.*] However, at the Mass the Scriptures are read from the Lectionary and not from sheets of paper.

- The readings before the Gospel may be read by family members, friends or lectors from the parish. If the family chooses not to read, members of the parish who are regular readers are available to exercise this ministry. A priest or deacon proclaims the Gospel. A requirement for readers is that the person be a Catholic and has the ability to read well so as to be understood by the congregation.

**Responsorial Psalm and Gospel Acclamation:** These are sung by the cantor or choir, with the people joining in the refrain.

**Homily:** The homily relates the experience of death to the paschal mystery of our Lord's death and resurrection and to the promise of eternal life. In order that the homily may be personal, the family may provide to the priest pertinent information about the life of their family member so that he may include an expression of praise and gratitude to God for the gift of a Christian life and such other virtues or strengths apparent in the deceased's life or in facing death. The homily also affirms God's compassionate love and offers hope and consolation to those who mourn.

**Intercessions:** The petitions are the only part of the Liturgy that may be composed locally. Models and samples of the intentions are contained in the Book of Readings and in the Ritual Book for the Order of Christian Funerals. They can be rewritten or adapted; nevertheless, there are guidelines for their structure. The intentions are to be brief, in the form of petitions, and are for the deceased, the family and all mourners, the church, and the needs of the world. They always include the response of the assembly after each petition.

- The family may wish to assist in the preparation of the intentions.
- One or several persons may read the intentions. The priest invites all to pray before the intentions are read and concludes them with a prayer. The person or persons reading the intentions come to the microphone before the priest begins the introduction, and they remain there until after the priest's concluding prayer. The Intercessions come after the period of silence after the Homily.

## Liturgy of the Eucharist

**Procession of Gifts:** From the beginning of the Church, people brought from their homes the bread and wine to be used in the celebration of the Eucharist, as well as food for the poor. In a symbolic way, members of the family bring forth to the priest at the altar the bread and wine to be used in the Funeral Mass. In this way they symbolize their offering to the Lord of themselves and the whole assembly. In addition, the people's gifts, which symbolize themselves, are transformed by the power of the Holy Spirit into the

Body and Blood of Christ, and then given back to them by God for their spiritual nourishment and transformation into the likeness of Christ.

- Two or three family members or friends may bring the container of bread and the pitcher of wine from the gift table to the priest.
- Immediately following the Intercessions, the people go to the back of the church to get the containers of bread and wine. They bring them to the priest who stands near or at the altar. After the priest has received all the gifts, he bows to the bearers. They bow to the priest and then return to their seats.

**Eucharistic Prayer:** The central element and action of the Mass is the Prayer of Thanksgiving which is offered to God the Father. This prayer sums up the praise of all the Church and all present for God's love and action through Jesus. In a Funeral Mass, in addition to our thanks for creation and salvation, we offer thanks for God's action in the life of the deceased.

- All present unite themselves spiritually with the prayer of the Church, which the priest proclaims in the name of all present and in the name of Christ.
- All join in singing the eucharistic acclamations.

**Communion Rite:** Having offered themselves and their love to God in thanksgiving for His many gifts, including the life of the deceased, the people of God are called to the Lord's Table to receive another gift. The Lord himself gives us his Body and Blood as He gave his life upon the Cross for us. The Lord who knows death first hand, comes to the members of the family, friends and all present to be with them in this time of sorrow and also to give them consolation and strength. Because Jesus died for us, He can ask us to trust and offer him our pain and sorrow, as well as the good times we enjoyed with our loved one. In the Eucharist, we offer this dear soul to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who is the creator and author of all life.

- Members of the Catholic Church come forward in procession to the Lord's altar to receive Communion. Communion may be given under both kinds.
- Family members and friends who are ministers of Communion in their parishes may wish to assist in this ministry. Arrangements should be discussed beforehand with the parish priest.

## Final Commendation

**Signs of Farewell:** The Funeral Liturgy is filled with signs of baptism and new life. When the body was brought into the church, it was placed near the paschal candle, which is a symbol of the Resurrected Christ. The candle was blessed at the Easter Vigil and is used at all baptisms and funerals. It is at this point that the body may be sprinkled with holy water as a reminder of the new life given in baptism, which marked the deceased for eternal life. Then, as a sign of respect for the body of the deceased, which was created by God and anointed as a temple of the Holy Spirit, the body may be incensed.

**Prayer:** Finally the priest commends the deceased to God and prays that He will accept him/her and embrace our loved one in the arms of everlasting life. We also give thanks to God for His goodness revealed in the life of the departed.

- Announcements: A member of the family may wish to invite all present to a reception; otherwise, a note with the details may be given to the priest so that he may extend an invitation to those present on behalf of the family.

**Concluding Rite**

**Procession:** As we carried the body of our loved one into the church, so now we leave to proceed to the place of burial.

- All join in the concluding hymn as the members of the family and friends join in the procession.
- If the pall was placed on the coffin by the family, they or others may remove it at the entrance to the church.

**Note:** Eulogy~ A family member or friend may speak words of remembrance at the Vigil Service, the cemetery or the reception. Sometimes the family arranges a “remembrance service” at the Funeral Home prior to the Mass.

**Music**

It is appropriate for family members to suggest hymns to be used at the Funeral Mass. The following guidelines are offered. The hymns chosen must be proper Catholic liturgical hymns, songs or chants and must be contained in the hymn books that are in use in the Church. The selection of hymns also depends on the repertory of the musicians, and whether the hymn is known by them and the congregation. Every effort should be made to include them, but no guarantee can be made. All hymns are to be sung by the congregation. Hymns are chosen on the basis of enabling the

assembly to participate in the liturgy, to praise and worship God and to enter into the paschal mystery which we celebrate in the Funeral Liturgy and indeed in every Liturgy of the Church. Hymns that were sentimental favourites do not necessarily make for good liturgy and participation. Solos are not part of the Catholic tradition of worship, for they make the assembly an audience rather than participants in the sacred action.

**Responsorial Psalm:** This is sung by a cantor, with the people singing the refrain. It should not be replaced by a hymn.

**Acclamations:** Particular efforts should be made to sing these acclamations during the Mass. They are:

- Gospel Acclamation: Sung before the reading of the gospel.
- Holy, holy, holy Lord.. Comes at the end of the preface of the Eucharistic Prayer. It is desirable for the priest to sing the preface.
- Memorial Acclamation: After the narrative of institution in the eucharistic prayer.
- Great Amen: Concluding and sealing the praise offered in the Eucharistic Prayer.
- **The Lord's Prayer:** The “Our Father” is the communion hymn of the Christian people. Normally, it is recited by the people. It may be sung, but always by all present, and never as a solo.

**Other chants:** Chants and hymns are sung at other points during the Mass. These include several which the choir may sing alone:

- Preparation of the gifts
- Lamb of God
- Communion procession hymn
- Music during Final Commendation (The people should join in singing the refrain).

**Procession Hymns:** In the Mass there are four processions which may be accompanied by community singing.

- entrance
- preparation of gifts
- communion
- recessional

The two most important hymns are the Entrance and Communion hymns. These properly are to be sung by all the people. The Entrance hymn is the assembly’s first corporate act of worship. It is usually a hymn of praise. The Communion hymn should help all

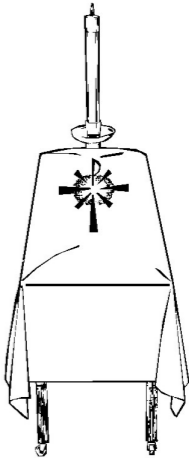
to deepen the meaning of Communion in the Body of Christ. The choir may either sing alone or instrumental music may be used to accompany the preparation of gifts.

**Prelude and postlude:** Before the service begins, the organist may play quietly to set an appropriate atmosphere of prayer and reverence for the celebration. Similarly, a postlude may be played after the service is over, until all the people have left.

**Approved Hymns:** The General Instruction of the Mass now requires that the bishops of each country or region approve the texts that are sung at the Liturgy of the Church. Care should be

exercised that hymns be now chosen from approved hymnals.

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Archdiocese of Kingston

**THE ORDER OF CHRISTIAN FUNERALS**

***PLANNING***  
***THE FUNERAL LITURGY***

“And if I go and prepare a place for you,  
I will come again and will take you to myself,  
so that where I am, there you may be also.” John 14.3

**Archdiocese of Kingston**

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