



## No 4. The Rites of the Church

The *Order of Christian Funerals* is the Church's ritual book containing the many rites and prayers that embrace those who are touched by grief. Various combinations are possible. It is structured around three major liturgies:

- Vigil of Christian Burial
- Funeral Mass *or*
- Funeral Liturgy Outside Mass
- Rite of Committal

### **Vigil and related Rites and Prayers**

The Vigil is a simple ritual based on the Word of God. It helps family and friends come to terms with their loss and turn to the Lord for help in the time of distress.

Held at the Church, home or other place, it may be led by a lay minister. It offers special support to a family before the celebration of the funeral rites.

The Vigil is the time when families might display pictures and objects associated with the one who has died. Time may also be given to sharing memories. Prayers such as the rosary may also be prayed.

In addition to the Vigil there are other rites and prayers for families at this time:

#### *Prayers after Death*

When the minister first meets the family.

#### *Gathering in the Presence of the Body*

When the family first gathers around the body of the deceased.

#### *Transfer of the Body*

When families prepare to accompany the body to the Church or Place of Committal.

### **Funeral Mass or Funeral Liturgy Outside Mass**

These are the two options for the central celebration of the funeral rites. The Mass is the most appropriate form for a Catholic who has regularly attended Sunday Mass.

Both begin with the reception of the Body and welcome of the mourners at the entrance to the Church (if this has not already occurred at a Vigil). The coffin is sprinkled with Holy Water and the Pall is placed, reminders of baptism and our life and death in the risen Christ. The procession into the church is accompanied by a song which expresses the faith of the

Church in the midst of sadness and grief. Christian symbols may also be placed on the coffin.

The Mass (or Liturgy of the Word) continues. After the readings the homily breaks open the Word of God in a way that assists those present to understand their loss in the light of Christ's death and resurrection. The homily is not a eulogy. It links the life of the deceased to Christian hope.

Both rituals conclude by commending the deceased to God's love and mercy. The coffin is reverently incensed and blessed. Prior to this a family member or friend may speak briefly in remembrance of the deceased. A song of Christian farewell is sung as people leave the Church. This final procession accompanies the body to its place of rest.

### **Committal**

The third part of the ritual process is the Committal at the cemetery or crematorium which marks the point of separation or letting go. Facing this reality is very difficult. The committal acknowledges the pain of separation and offers comfort and Christian hope to mourners. It may be led by a lay minister. The Church continues to support families in the days and months that follow.

### **Preparing the Rites**

Preparing the rites involves choosing readings, prayers and music that is woven into the Church's liturgy. The liturgy provides a framework which expresses the faith of the Church, offering Christian hope and consolation.

For families in the midst of grief, sometimes this task appears to be too difficult to face. As Christians, we are encouraged to develop and deepen our faith. November, the month for remembering the dead, may also be an opportunity to reflect on the funeral prayers and rites. It would assist us when we come to prepare the funeral of a loved one.

#### *From the ORDER OF CHRISTIAN FUNERALS*

#### **Reception of the Body**

- Greeting
- Sprinkling with water
- Placing of Pall
- Entrance Procession
- Placing of Christian Symbols

#### **Vigil**

- Introductory Rites
- Liturgy of the Word
- Placing of personal objects*
- Sharing of memories*
- Optional prayers*
- Prayer of Intercession
- Concluding Rite

#### **Funeral Mass**

- Introductory Rites
- Liturgy of the Word
- Liturgy of the Eucharist
- Final Commendation
- Procession to place of committal

#### **Funeral Liturgy Outside Mass**

- Introductory Rites
- Liturgy of the Word
- The Lord's Prayer
- Final Commendation
- Procession to place of committal

#### **Committal**

- Procession to resting place
- Scripture
- Prayer over place of committal
- Committal
- Intercessions
- The Lord's Prayer
- Concluding Prayer
- Prayer over the people
- Sign of leave-taking

#### **SYMBOLS AND ACTIONS**

##### **Pall**

Baptismal garment

##### **Christian Symbols**

objects that prepared the Christian for eternal life

##### **Sprinkled Water**

saving waters of baptism

##### **Processions**

expressing unity and movement towards eternal home

##### **Paschal Candle**

the risen Christ in our midst passing from death to life

##### **Incense**

rising of prayer to God honouring the body