

CATHOLIC FUNERAL RITES

This is an overview of the Catholic funeral rites, based on information found on the Diocese of Orlando website. There is also basic information about cremation taken from the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops website. The Catholic funeral rites are divided into three different parts, each with its own purpose: these are the Vigil Service, the Funeral Liturgy and the Rite of Committal.

I. VIGIL SERVICE (Wake)

“At the vigil, the Christian community keeps watch with the family in prayer to the God of mercy and finds strength in Christ’s presence” (Order of Christian Funerals, no. 56). The Vigil Service usually takes place during the period of visitation and viewing at the funeral home. It is a time to remember the life of the deceased and to commend him/her to God. In prayer we ask God to console us in our grief and give us strength to support one another. The Vigil Service can take the form of a Service of the Word with readings from Sacred Scripture accompanied by reflection and prayers. It can also take the form of one of the prayers of the Office for the Dead from the Liturgy of the Hours. It is most appropriate, when family and friends are gathered together for visitation, to offer time for recalling the life of the deceased. For this reason, eulogies are usually encouraged to be done at the funeral home during visitation or at the Vigil Service.

II. FUNERAL LITURGY

The funeral liturgy is the central liturgical celebration of the Christian community for the deceased. When one of its members dies, the Church encourages the celebration of the funeral liturgy at a Mass. When Mass cannot be celebrated, a Funeral Liturgy Outside Mass can be celebrated at the church or in the funeral home. At the funeral liturgy, the Church gathers with the family and friends of the deceased to give praise and thanks to God for Christ’s victory over sin and death, to commend the deceased to God’s tender mercy and compassion, and to seek strength in the proclamation of the Paschal Mystery. The funeral liturgy, therefore, is an act of worship, and not merely an expression of grief.

III. RITE OF COMMITTAL (Burial or Interment)

The Rite of Committal, the conclusion of the funeral rite, is the final act of the community of faith in caring for the body of its deceased member. It should normally be celebrated at the place of committal, that is, beside the open grave or place of interment. In committing the body to its resting place, the community expresses the hope that, with all those who have gone before us marked with the sign of faith, the deceased awaits the glory of the resurrection. The Rite of Committal is an expression of the communion that exists between the Church on earth and the Church in heaven: the deceased passes with the farewell prayers of the community of believers into the welcoming company of those who need faith no longer but see God face-to-face.

ABOUT CREMATION

The cremated remains of a body should be treated with the same respect given to the human body from which they come. This includes the use of a worthy vessel to contain the ashes, the manner in which they are carried, and the care and attention to appropriate placement and transport, and the final disposition. The cremated remains should be buried in a grave or entombed in a mausoleum or columbarium. The practice of scattering cremated remains on the sea, from the air, or on the ground, or keeping cremated remains on the home of a relative or friend of the deceased is not the reverent disposition that the Church requires. (Order of Christian Funerals no. 417)