

Funerals - Frequently Asked Questions

(This excerpt is from the diocese of Cleveland website at www.dioceseofcleveland.org/offices/worship/faqs)

How much does a funeral Mass cost?

Masses are not bought and sold, and so, in that sense, a funeral Mass does not “cost” anything. The inability of an individual to make a donation to the parish church should never be a reason for a parish not to provide a funeral Mass for a practicing Catholic. That being said, parish churches do incur costs for the use of the building, the time invested by the parish staff, and for the skills of parish musicians, altar servers, and others involved in celebrating your loved ones’ funeral Mass. A donation from the family to offset these costs, while not required, is greatly appreciated. If your family wishes to make a donation to the parish to offset funeral expenses, make these arrangements with the pastor or the parish secretary.

My loved one was not an active Catholic. May they still have a funeral Mass?

The pastor of your loved ones’ parish church is the best person to determine this, in consultation with the family. The Catholic Church has other options for Catholic funeral liturgies that may be more appropriate if your loved one was not a practicing Catholic.

My loved one has died. What should I do now?

First, contact your loved ones’ Catholic parish. If you are not sure which Catholic parish they belong to, start with the parish church closest geographically to your loved ones’ home. Then, contact a funeral home. The parish and the funeral home cooperate to provide care and comfort to families preparing funerals and burials.

Where does a funeral Mass take place?

The preferred location is your loved one’s parish church. In some circumstances, the parish church of someone else in your loved one’s family may be appropriate. The permanent chapel of a Catholic nursing home may also be used, if your loved one was a longtime resident. The pastor of your loved ones’ parish church should be part of the discussion when determining where to celebrate your loved ones’ funeral Mass.

Does the Catholic Church allow cremation?

Yes, the Catholic Church allows cremation, within certain guidelines (2016 Vatican Instruction: to Rise With Christ):

The Church continues to prefer the practice of burying the bodies of the deceased [in cemeteries or other sacred places], because this shows a greater esteem towards the deceased.

When cremation has been chosen, the ashes of the faithful must be laid to rest in a sacred place: a cemetery, or in a church or another area which has been set aside and dedicated by the bishop for this purpose.

A simple but worthy funeral urn is most appropriate for containing the ashes after cremation.

Keeping the ashes of the deceased in a domestic residence is not permitted.

The ashes may not be divided among various family members.

It is not permitted to scatter the ashes in the air, on land, at sea.

It is not permitted to [preserve the ashes] in mementos, pieces of jewelry or other objects.

When does a funeral Mass take place?

Catholic funeral Masses may be celebrated on any day except: Sundays, Holy Days, and the Easter Triduum (Holy Thursday, Good Friday, and Holy Saturday). Generally speaking, funeral Masses are celebrated on days and at times that are convenient to family members, and suitable for the schedule of the parish church and the funeral home.

Is there a book that can tell me about Catholic funerals?

The Order of Christian Funerals, published in 1989, contains a clear theology of the attitude of the Catholic Church toward life after death and the respect the Church has for the human person, body and soul. An appendix to this ritual on cremation was published in 1997. The use of both is required in the United States. There are various Catholic funeral preparation guidelines published for use by the faithful on the occasion of a loved ones' death. Your parish will be able to direct you to one of these resources, or you may contact the Office for Worship to learn more.

Does the Catholic Church allow eulogies? How are eulogies different from homilies? What are "remarks/words of remembrance?"

A eulogy ("to speak well of someone") is a brief speech about the good qualities of the deceased person. Eulogies are appropriate when spoken at the funeral home during the visitation, during the Vigil in the church, or during a family gathering after the Committal (burial); eulogies are not appropriate during the funeral Mass. In contrast, the homily, given by the priest (or in some cases, the deacon) during the funeral Mass brings together the Scripture readings of the funeral Mass, the Catholic belief in the resurrection, and some qualities of the deceased person's life that may be examples of the Scripture texts, or of Christian living in general.

Remarks/words of remembrance are an option before the prayers of Commendation, near the end of the funeral Mass. These remarks are not a eulogy, but a brief word of thanksgiving for the life and faith of the deceased. Only one person should make these remarks, and that person should stand next to the priest celebrant to make these remarks, rather than standing at the ambo or lectern.

Does the Catholic Church allow organ or body donation?

Yes, the donation of one's organs is a commonplace and praiseworthy option. The donation of the entire body to scientific study is also permitted. Once the scientific study of the entire body has been completed, the body should be properly buried, or cremated and properly interred.

What are the parts of the funeral Mass? How should we prepare our loved ones' funeral Mass?

Funeral Masses include songs and hymns, Scripture readings, prayers, and sharing of the Eucharistic elements: the Body and Blood of Christ under the appearance of consecrated bread and consecrated wine. Your loved one may have made some funeral Mass plans before their death. If these can be found, they will be a good starting place. Your loved ones' parish church staff will also have many resources to assist you in planning your loved ones' funeral. Contact your loved ones' parish church as soon after their death as possible, so that the church staff is able to assist you in making your loved ones' funeral Mass plans.

My loved one was an active, practicing Catholic, but the family is not. Is a funeral Mass required?

The Church's care for Catholics includes the celebration of their life, and their faith in the resurrection, with a funeral Mass. Even if other family members are not practicing Catholics, a funeral Mass is the best choice for a practicing Catholic who has died. Remember, the parish church community was also a part of your loved ones' life, and many members of the parish will also want an opportunity to mourn and to celebrate your loved one.

My loved one is gravely ill, hospitalized, on hospice care, or actively dying. What should I do now?

Contact your loved ones' Catholic parish. If you are not sure which Catholic parish they belong to, start with the parish church closest geographically to your loved ones' home. The Church is able to provide comfort and consolation to your loved one, including the sacrament of Anointing of the Sick, Holy Communion as Viaticum, and pastoral visits. These visits may also comfort and console your family and friends.