

MAJOR FUNERAL RITES OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH

I. VIGIL FOR THE DECEASED (WAKE)

The Vigil for the deceased is the official prayer service of the church for the deceased and the first of the three major rites celebrated by the Catholic community. The vigil service is never omitted.

When: The vigil is celebrated between the time of death and the funeral liturgy, often on the day before or evening before the funeral Mass.

Where: The vigil may take place in the home of the deceased, at a funeral home, or in the church.

Minister: A priest, deacon, or lay minister may lead this prayer.

Content: The vigil takes the form of the Liturgy of the Word. It includes readings from sacred Scripture, song(s), psalm(s), and intercessory prayer. A brief homily/reflection by the leader is also included. At the conclusion of the vigil service is the best time for family and friends to offer stories, reflections, and eulogies on the life of the deceased, rather than at the funeral Mass. Devotional prayers, such as the rosary, may not replace the vigil service.

II. FUNERAL MASS

The funeral Mass is the central liturgical celebration for the deceased. The Catholic community reaffirms in sign and symbol, word and gesture, that through baptism we share in Christ's death and resurrection, and look forward to the day when we will be raised up and united in the kingdom of light and peace.

When: The funeral Mass is normally celebrated the evening before, or on the day of burial.

Where: The funeral Mass takes place in the parish church.

Minister: A priest is the presider for a funeral Mass.

Content: The funeral Mass begins at the entrance of the church. The priest and the gathered assembly receive the body of the deceased. The coffin is sprinkled with holy water and the pall is placed upon it by family or friends of the deceased to recall baptism. The body is carried in procession toward the altar and placed near the paschal candle. When the coffin is in place, other Christian symbols, such as the Book of Gospels or cross may be placed on it.

Mass continues as the community celebrates the Liturgy of the Word. The homily is based on the readings and focuses on the paschal mystery and God's love. The assembly prays for the deceased and the bereaved in the intercessions. The Liturgy of the Eucharist is celebrated in the usual manner. In word and sacrament, we celebrate Christ's death and resurrection and reaffirm our share in this mystery.

The Final Commendation immediately follows the prayer after Communion. At this time the deceased is entrusted to God's tender care. While an extended time of remembrance is most appropriate for the vigil, if desired, one family member or friend may offer a brief prepared eulogy before the Final Commendation begins. The Song of Farewell is the climax of the rite of Final Commendation. This song, sung by the assembly, is meant to affirm hope and trust in the paschal mystery. The body may be incensed during or following the Song of Farewell. The Prayer of Commendation concludes the rite.

The procession is formed and the body is carried to the place of burial/committal.

Music: Music selections for funerals are made in conjunction with the ministers of music in the parish and follow the directives of the Roman Catholic Church regarding music in the liturgy. Some requested music selections that do not fall within these norms may be appropriate during the period of the wake.

III. BURIAL/COMMITTAL

The funeral rites conclude with the Rite of Committal.

When: The burial/committal takes place as soon as possible after the funeral Mass.

Where: The Rite of Committal takes place beside the open grave or place of interment. If this is not possible, it may take place in a cemetery chapel.

Minister: A priest, deacon, or lay person may lead this service.

Content: Though brief, the Rite of Committal assists the bereaved at this most difficult time. This rite includes a short Scriptural verse, the prayer of committal, intercessions, Lord's prayer and a blessing. The lowering of the body into the grave or placement in the tomb or crematorium may take place following the prayer of committal or at the conclusion of the rite. A song affirming hope in the resurrection may conclude this rite. Those who wish may offer some gesture of leave-taking at this time.

RELATED OPTIONAL RITES

Though secondary, these rites are helpful in accompanying the mourners at times of transition and through the various stages of facing the reality of death.

Prayers After Death

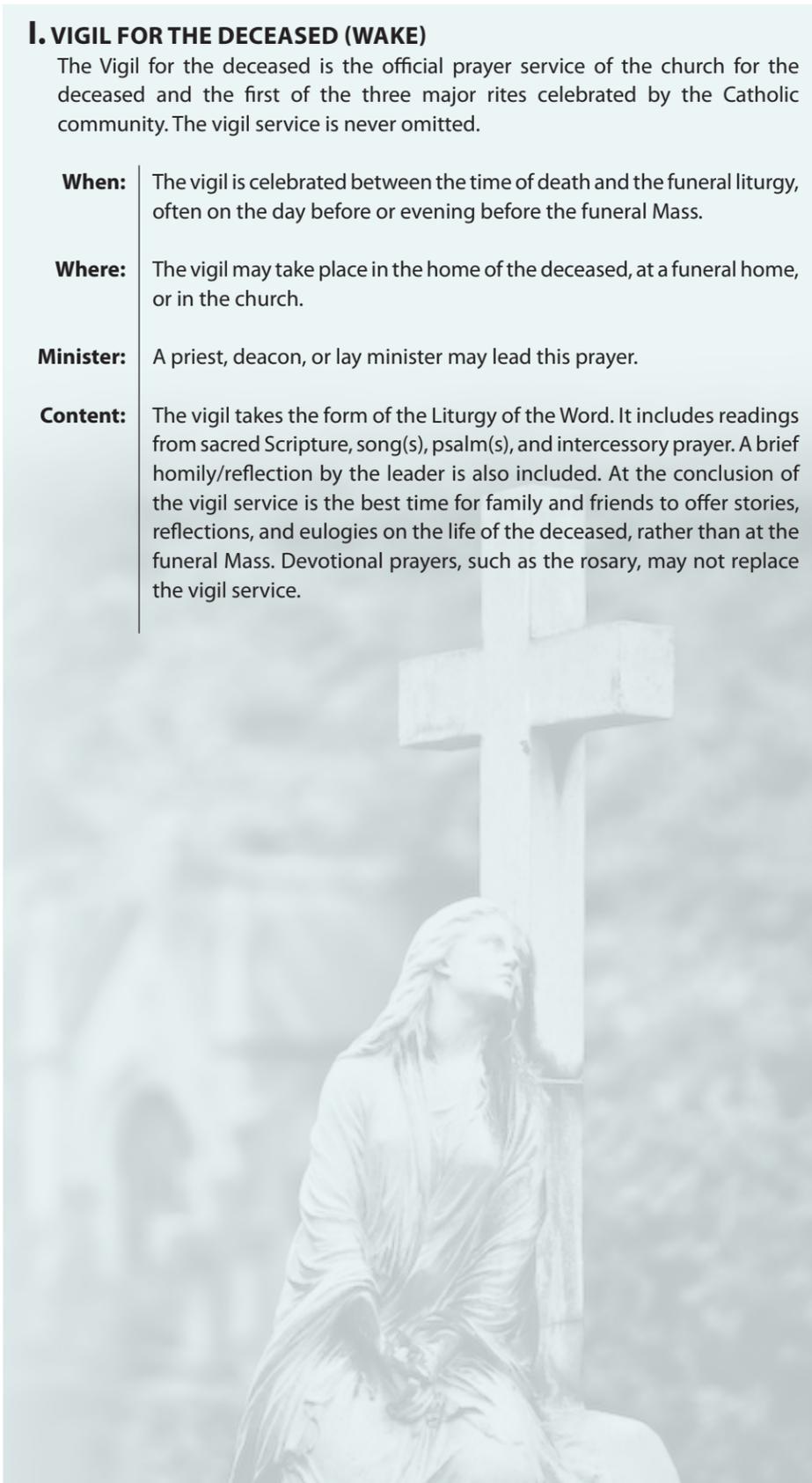
This rite offers a model of prayer, which may be used in whole, in part, or adapted for particular circumstances. It consists of a brief reading, the Lord's Prayer and some concluding prayers. This rite may be used when the pastoral minister (i.e. priest, deacon, or layperson) first meets with the family following the death.

Gathering in the Presence of the Body

As the family gathers in the presence of the body for the first time, the pastoral minister's presence offers prayer and support for the family. This rite consists of a short passage from Scripture, a psalm, sprinkling with holy water, and the Lord's Prayer.

Transfer of the Body to the Church or to the Place of Committal

This rite supports the family and friends as they prepare to take the body to the church or place of committal. It consists of a brief Scripture verse, litany, the Lord's Prayer and a concluding prayer.



CREMATION

The Catholic Church permits cremation unless it is evident that cremation was chosen for anti-Christian motives. When cremation is chosen one of the following options is used.

1. Cremation After the Funeral Liturgy:

Even when cremation is chosen, the Church recommends that the body of the deceased be present for the funeral rites. The presence of the human body better expresses the values that the Church affirms in the funeral rites. When cremation follows the liturgy, the funeral liturgy and other rites are celebrated as described above.

2. Funeral Liturgy in the Presence of the Cremated Remains:

The Holy See has given the bishop of each diocese the authority to allow the celebration of a funeral liturgy in the presence of the cremated remains of the body. The cremated remains of the body are to be treated with the same respect given to the human body. Prior to the funeral Mass or as a part of the entrance procession of the Mass, a worthy vessel, containing the cremated remains, is carried with reverence into the church. The cremated remains are placed on a suitable stand or table in the place normally occupied by the coffin.

The funeral Mass begins with the sprinkling of holy water; however, a pall is not placed over the cremated remains. The funeral Mass is celebrated as described above. Following the prayer after Communion, the rite of final commendation takes place as usual.

3. Cremation and Committal Prior to the Funeral Liturgy:

When the body is cremated and committed soon after death, the rites of final commendation and committal are used at the appropriate times, even though occurring prior to the funeral liturgy. The vigil and other rites are also adapted, as necessary. Following the committal, the family and friends of the deceased join the community in celebrating the funeral liturgy. After Communion, the blessing is given and the people are dismissed.

The cremated remains of the body, due the same respect as the remains of the body, must be buried in a cemetery, entombed in a columbarium or buried at sea.

CEMETERY

Burial takes place in a special area set aside for the resting place of the deceased. Aside from the legal restrictions for burial, a Catholic may choose the site of burial.

Catholic Cemetery

A Catholic cemetery is a sacred place that is set aside by the local Church's bishop. A Catholic cemetery is the resting place for those who are baptized, who worshipped and lived their Christian faith, and in death complete their baptismal commitment at rest with their fellow companions in faith. However, it is not a requirement to be Catholic to be buried in a Catholic cemetery.

Catholic cemeteries provide traditional burials, crypts, cremation burials, and above-ground columbarium niches.

The Catholic Cemeteries Office of the Archdiocese of Louisville operates and maintains four archdiocesan cemeteries including: Calvary Cemetery, St. Michael Cemetery, St. Louis Cemetery and St. John Cemetery. Since 1851, Catholic Cemeteries has been providing experienced and caring services to our Catholic community. There are an additional thirty-eight parish-operated cemeteries throughout the Archdiocese of Louisville.

Non-Denominational Cemetery

Within the norms for Catholic burial, a Catholic may choose to be buried in a cemetery other than a Catholic one. The Rite of Committal includes a ritual for blessing the place of burial if it has not been previously blessed.

For additional information please contact the Archdiocese of Louisville:

Catholic Cemeteries Office

1600 Newburg Road
P.O. Box 4096
Louisville, KY 40204
phone: (502) 451-7710
fax: (502) 456-9270
email: cemeteries@archlou.org

Office of Worship

1200 South Shelby Street
phone: (502) 636-0296
fax: (502) 636-2379
email: worship@archlou.org

Roman Catholic Funeral Rites



The Archdiocese of Louisville
Catholic Cemeteries Office
Office of Worship



The Archdiocese of Louisville