

Catholic Funeral Services

In the *Order of Christian Funerals*, the official book that describes the Catholic funeral rites, it notes a Catholic funeral consists of three major parts: the Vigil Service, the Funeral Mass, and the Committal Rite.

✧ **VIGIL SERVICE (WAKE).** The Vigil or Wake Service usually occurs in the funeral home or in the parish church on the eve of the Funeral Mass. Here friends and relatives keep watch with the family, pray together, and remember the deceased person's life. On occasion, if there has not been a gathering of family and friends at the funeral home the night before, this service may take place for about an hour or so on the morning of the Funeral Mass.

✧ **FUNERAL MASS.** The tradition of the Church is to celebrate a Funeral Mass with the Christian community, family, and friends of the deceased. The Funeral Mass includes the reception of the body, the liturgy of the word, the liturgy of the Eucharist, and the final commendation and farewell.

✧ **COMMITTAL RITE.** It is the ancient custom of the Church to reverently bury or entomb the bodies of its dead in a cemetery. The Committal Rite, the conclusion to the Catholic funeral services, is the final act of the community of faith, family, and friends in caring for the body of the deceased. This service normally occurs at the open grave or place of interment, rather than at a cemetery chapel.



Speaking in Remembrance of the Deceased

During the three ritual moments of the Catholic funeral rites there are times when the priest, deacon or another designated person gives a reflection. This reflection normally occurs after the reading of the Scriptures and is called a homily. During the Funeral Mass the person who gives the homily is either an ordained priest or a deacon.

Can Other People Speak in Remembrance?

There are two occasions where a family member or friend may speak during the Catholic funeral rites.

The first occasion may take place after the closing prayer of the Vigil Service (Wake). This is an appropriate time where family and friends may stay and share their stories, poems, songs, and fond memories of the deceased person. If the only opportunity for visitation will take place immediately prior to the Funeral Mass, time could be given then for these reflections.

A second occasion when someone may speak in remembrance is following the prayer after Communion at the Funeral Mass. To speak on this occasion, prior approval from the priest celebrant of the Funeral Mass is recommended.



Guidance for Those Who Speak at the Funeral Mass

The following information may be helpful to those who may speak in remembrance of the deceased at the Funeral Mass.

- One or two speakers are better than a series of speakers.
- Reflections are best remembered if kept to around five minutes in length, i.e., approximately one typed single-spaced page.
- Reflections written out beforehand are best, especially if a speaker becomes emotional.
- It is best to speak compassionately and honestly, recalling circumstances of the life of the deceased.
- The content might include:
 - Inspiring qualities of the deceased, including their life of faith;
 - How the deceased may best be remembered;
 - How our relationship with the deceased is maintained even in death and how we look forward to meeting them again in the future.

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The Catholic Funeral Rites

When Speaking in Remembrance of a Loved One

A Practical Parish Guide