200 Ecclesiastical Funeral Rites

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"The Order of Christian Funerals was canonically approved by the National Conference of Catholic Bishops in the plenary assembly on 14 November 1985 and was subsequently confirmed by the Apostolic See by decree of the Congregation for Divine Worship on 29 April 1987 (Prot. N. CD 1550/85). ...From All Souls Day, 2 November 1989, its use is mandatory in the dioceses of the United States of America. From that date forward no other English version of these rites may be used." (Order of Christian Funerals: Decree of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops). The Catholic funeral rite is composed of three distinct parts, each with its own structure: the Vigil Service (Wake), the Funeral Liturgy, and the Rite of Committal (Burial or Internment).

Vigil Service (Wake)

The Vigil can be celebrated in a funeral home, a church, or the home of the deceased (Order of Christian Funerals, no. 55). "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).

Generally a priest or deacon is the minister at the vigil service; however, any lay person, who has received adequate formation can preside at the Vigil as well as the Rite of Committal (Order of Christian Funerals, no. 14). This service can be a Liturgy of the Word which includes Scripture readings, reflection, and prayers (Order of Christian Funerals, no. 69-81, 82-97) or it can be prayers from the Office for the Dead from the Liturgy of the Hours (Order of Christian Funerals, no. 348-396). When the Vigil Service is in the form of a Liturgy of the Word, it should be composed of the introductory rites, the Scripture readings, the prayer of intercession, and a

concluding rite (Order of Christian Funerals, no. 57.). It is often the custom to pray the Rosary before or after the Vigil and this practice is to be commended and encouraged. Since the Vigil is the official liturgical prayer of the community and the Rosary is a private devotion, the faithful should be taught that it is not to be prayed during the Vigil.

This is the time for family and friends to gather to remember their loved one, pray together, and offer support to one another. For this reason, this is a most appropriate time for eulogies to be given; this is also an opportune time for relatives or friends to offer words of remembrance (Order of Christian Funerals, no. 62). It is important to note the definitions of eulogy and remembrance. A eulogy is a formal and lengthy address that praises the life of the deceased, especially his or her accomplishments. A remembrance is very brief, informal and shares the ways in which the deceased touched the life of the speaker.

Funeral Liturgy

The Funeral Liturgy is the central liturgical celebration of the Catholic funeral rite. Gathered together to celebrate the Funeral Liturgy, the Christian community gives thanks to God for Christ's victory over death, commends their loved one to God's mercy, and seeks consolation in their time of loss. The Funeral Liturgy is not simply a time to gather to express of sorrow and grief, but most importantly it is a time to worship as a community united in faith. Therefore, it is important the following guidelines be respected.