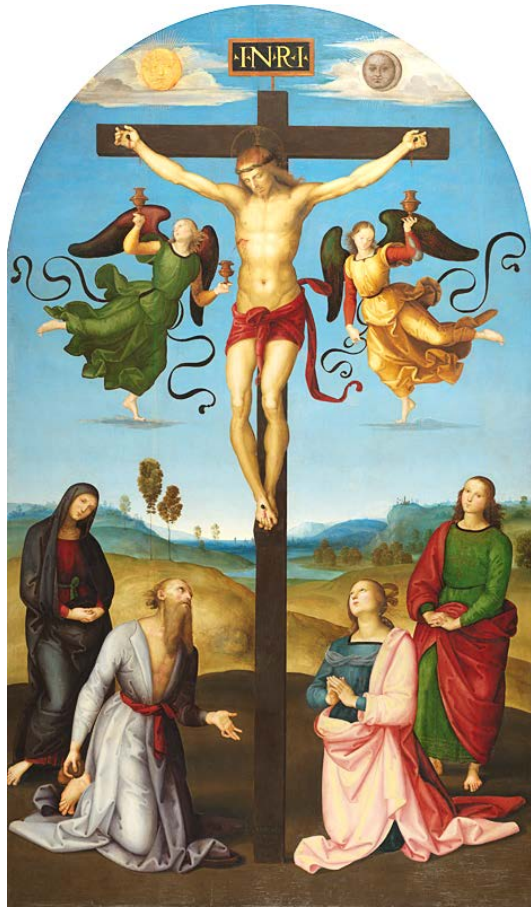


A Guide to Funeral Masses



St. Raymond of Peñafort Catholic Church

Springfield, VA
(Revised April 2024)

Like all Masses, the Funeral Mass is, above all else, a sacrifice to give praise and glory to God. But the Funeral Mass for deceased Catholics has three other essential purposes. One of these is to show respect for the deceased and to honor their body in way consistent with and expressive of a Catholic understanding of life, death and hope in the Resurrection. Also, there is the intention to comfort and assist the surviving family and friends in their grief through hope in the Risen Christ. And finally, and by far most importantly, the Funeral offers the Sacrifice of the Mass and the prayers of the faithful for the repose of the soul of the deceased, assisting them through their final purification so that they may enter the glory of Heaven.

With this in mind the Church has, over the centuries, developed a liturgy involving various rituals, customs and traditions which have been handed down as a gift to us today. So that when a family comes to us requesting our assistance, this is what we have to offer. St. Raymond's, in particular, strives to celebrate this liturgy in the context of 2000 years of tradition and teaching, and so reach into the Catholic treasury to provide the very best we can offer.

Who Can Be Allowed a Funeral Mass at St. Raymond's?

Generally, the following are allowed a Funeral Mass.

- Any baptized Catholic or catechumen;
- Unbaptized babies of Catholic parents who had intended to have them baptized;
- A baptized Protestant, provided their own minister is not available, and the deceased had no objection.
- Some people, even some Catholics may NOT have a Funeral Mass, but these involve rare and serious issues.

Choices to be Made for Funeral Mass. Like any Catholic Mass, the Funeral Mass follows a set of rituals and established customs. Unlike services in Protestant denominations, other religions, or in the secular environment, these are, for the most part, not subject to individual preferences, especially those which seem inconsistent with the Catholic Faith or traditions.

Moreover, long pastoral experience leads the Priests of St. Raymond to follow certain norms that we believe are best suited for our times, in keeping with the Catholic tradition.

Even so, there are various parts of the Mass that involve choices to be made by the deceased or his/her family.

- **“Program.”** There is no requirement to have a program for the Funeral Mass, and most Funerals do not have them. But if they want to, families may compile a “program” for the Mass to assist the congregation in following and participating in the ritual.

- It should be essentially an outline of the Mass.
- A suitable obituary may be included, but care should be taken not to conflict with Catholic sensitivities.
- No secular or non-Christian texts (e.g., poetry) may be included.
- The Parish will provide the family with an excellent template to work with.
- Since it will be distributed in our church, the Pastor must approve it before it is printed (this can be coordinated through the Parish Secretary).
- **Readings.** The Scriptural readings of the Funeral Mass may be chosen from a list offered by the official Roman Ritual (a copy of all these readings is available from the Parish). As in all Masses the readings are as follows:
 - A **First Reading** from the Old Testament, or the New Testament during the Easter Season;
 - A **Responsorial Psalm**, usually sung by the Cantor;
 - An optional **Second Reading** from the New Testament;
 - A **Verse before the Gospel** which is usually sung with the refrain “Alleluia”;
 - **The Gospel.**
- **Hymns.** Only Sacred Music is appropriate at the Catholic Mass. For example, there is some music that is religious, but not what the Church calls “Sacred.” Moreover, some religious music might also reflect doctrinal understandings that are inconsistent with Catholicism. And, finally, some music is simply secular, and while beautiful, either not reflective of the Christian faith, or not consistent with the ritual prayers.

Because of this, the family may choose much of the hymnody, but are asked to work closely with the Parish’s Musical Director, who is an expert in her field, instructed by and well versed in the Church’s and Pastor’s requirements. She will provide many very beautiful and appropriate suggestions, and will consider particular requests the family might have.
- **Musicians/Cantors.** A Parish cantor and organist are normally required at every Funeral Mass at the Parish, unless circumstances warrant otherwise. Musicians and singers are usually provided through the Parish. Any other musicians/cantors must be approved by the Music Director, and normally must be professional or at least professionally trained.
- **Readers.** The Scripture Readings will be read by *our regular Parish Lectors/Readers* who are assigned by the Pastor. If the family

wishes to pick their own Reader(s), the Pastor may make an exception in some cases if the Reader(s) the family proposes provides a letter of good standing from their own Proper Pastors. They must also agree to follow our Parish policies, including:

- the Church requires that they *must be practicing Catholics in good standing.*
- They must dress appropriately for this function (modestly, simply, respectfully, etc.).
- They should be able to read clearly and well, and generally should not be someone who might be, understandably, prone to become emotional during the reading.

Contact our Parish Office for further information.

- **General Intercessions.** There are particular ritual petitions provided for the Funeral. Because of the composition of these prayers, the Priest or deacon normally reads them.
- **Gift bearers.** It is not required, but if the family requests an Offertory Procession for the Presentation of the Gifts, they may choose 2 or 3 people to “bring up the gifts” (the unconsecrated bread, wine and water). These also must be *practicing Catholics in good standing*, must dress appropriately for this function, and are subject to approval by the Pastor.
- **Pallbearers.** The family may choose the pallbearers. They are only required to dress appropriately and behave reverently.
- **Placing the Pall.** The “Pall” is a large white cloth that covers the casket throughout the Mass. It symbolizes the Baptismal garment given to Catholics at most baptisms. Normally the Funeral directors will place the Pall on the casket at the beginning of the Mass, and remove it at the end, but family members or friends may do this instead.
- **Carrying the Urn.** In the case of a cremation, a family member or friend normally carries the Urn with the remains in procession with the Priest and servers into and out of the church at the beginning and end of Mass.
- **Altar Servers.** The Parish will provide Altar Servers for the Mass, who are trained to serve in our church. If there is a particularly important reason, they family wishes to add an *extra* server from among the family or friends, they may ask the Pastor for permission.
- **Celebrants or Concelebrants.** Upon request the Pastor may permit a visiting Priest to be the Celebrant or Concelebrant of the Mass. Any Priest permitted to celebrate or concelebrate must submit the

documents required by the U.S. Bishops to the Pastor and the Bishop of Arlington at least the day before the Funeral Mass.

- **Eulogies.** No eulogies or other talks remembering or honoring the deceased may be given at the Funeral Mass. There will be no exceptions to this. Such eulogies or talks are very appropriate for the wake/visitation the night before, or after the graveside liturgy, or at a reception after the Funeral.
- **Latin/English.** It is our custom that parts of the Mass are always sung in Latin at St. Raymond's: the Sanctus (Holy, Holy), the Agnus Dei (Lamb of God). Otherwise, the language of the Funeral Mass is normally English, unless pastoral need calls for another language, e.g., Spanish. The Priests of St. Raymond are also happy to offer any other part of the Mass in Latin, if they are requested to.
- **Orientation of the Altar.** Most Masses at St. Raymond's follow the ancient practice of the Church of offering Mass "*ad orientem*" (that is, facing east, or the Priest at the altar facing in the same direction of the people). This is also our normal practice at Funeral Masses, i.e., *ad orientem*. However, the Funeral Mass may be offered "*versus populum*" (that is, with the Priest at the altar facing the people), if requested by the family.
- **The Priest's Vestments.** The Priest is allowed to wear vestments of one of three colors: black, violet or white. At St. Raymond's the Priests usually follow the ancient custom of wearing black. (The particular set of black vestments we normally use is a beautiful set of black with gold embroidery, so that it almost looks like a gold vestment). If the family has a particular preference in this regard, they may discuss it with the Priest.

Outline of the Funeral Mass. The ritual of the Funeral Mass is mostly the same as any other Mass except at the beginning and end of Mass.

- **Before Mass.** All readers and gift bearers should arrive at least 20 minutes early and present themselves to the Priest for instruction on their functions
- **Beginning of Mass: Procession.**
 - The family (and any others they invite) gather with the casket (or urn) in the narthex (lobby) at the door into the nave of the church. Funeral directors will usually assist in this.
 - (If the casket is draped with a flag the Funeral directors remove it at this time).

- The Priest and servers come from the sacristy behind the altar/sanctuary and greet the family and casket/urn at the door.
- The Mass begins, and the Priest blesses the casket/urn.
- The Pall is placed on the casket (the urn does not receive a Pall).
- Then the Priest and servers lead the casket/urn and family up the aisle into the church.
- The casket is placed at the foot of the sanctuary in front of the Pascal Candle. An urn is placed on a table there.
- The family enters the pews reserved for them on the left, in front of the pulpit.
- The Priest goes to his chair and begins with the Opening Prayer (Collect).
- After the Opening Prayer everyone is seated for the First Reading and Mass proceeds as usual.

- **End of Mass:**

- There is no closing blessing.
- After the Prayer After Communion, ("Let us pray.... Through Christ our Lord. Amen"), the Priest and servers go to the casket.
- The Priest incenses the casket: "And the smoke of the incense of the prayers of the saints ascended up before God from the hand of the angel" (Rev. 8:2).
- The Priest says the Final Commendation, which concludes with, "Let us take our brother/sister to his/her place of rest."
- The Priest and servers line up to lead the casket/urn out of the church.
- If there is a casket, the Funeral directors approach it and turn it 180°, and then usually invite the Pallbearers to approach. If there is an urn, a family member approaches the table and takes the urn
- The Priest and servers lead the procession of the casket/urn, followed by family and friends, out of the church into the narthex.
- The Pall is removed in the narthex (the flag, if any, is replaced).
- Instructed by the Funeral directors, the Pallbearers carry the casket outside and place it in the hearse.

- **Funeral Procession.** If the interment is to take place immediately after the Funeral Mass the Priest who celebrates the Funeral Mass will normally accompany the family to the cemetery.
 - This procession is a continuation of the ritual begun at the Funeral Mass, so the Priest will either ride in the hearse or drive himself immediately behind the hearse in procession—he is still

“officiating.”

- The Funeral procession will leave the church almost immediately after the Funeral Mass ends and the body has been placed in the hearse, pausing only briefly to allow the cars to line up in procession.
- All this is modified as appropriate if there has been a cremation.
- **Cemetery.** At the cemetery, the Priest will pray the Rite of Committal. The Priest greets the casket as it is taken from the hearse, and then leads the pallbearers to the gravesite. The Rite immediately begins before any other memorials or military honors.
 - **Caveat.** When the cemetery is more than a 30-minute drive from the Parish, if the Celebrating Priest is from St. Raymond’s, he may not be able to accompany the body to the cemetery. Usually a Priest stationed at a church near the cemetery will be able to assist at the cemetery. This should be discussed with the Parish Office when making final arrangements.

Other Factors to Consider

Praying for the Dead. The Mass is offered as a prayer for the soul of the deceased, and so the Church’s Doctrine on the final purification after death, Purgatory, will be referred to in the prayers and in the homily.

Honoring God. As mentioned above, the principal action at every Mass is to honor and praise God, so that while the deceased is honored at his/her Funeral Mass, the primary focus is praying, in praise and supplication, to God.

Exchanging the Sign of Peace. Experience has taught us that the exchanging of the Sign of Peace by the people is not always either practical or preferable. In fact, we find that many people feel uncomfortable or even afraid of this practice. So it is our practice that after the Priest says, “the peace of the Lord be with you always,” and the people respond, “and with your spirit,” the people **do not** exchange the sign of peace (handshakes, hugs etc.) and the Mass immediately moves on to the Agnus Dei (Lamb of God).

Visitation/Viewing. If requested, a Priest will come to the “Visitation” the evening/day before the Funeral Mass. He can offer either ritual prayers for the “Vigil” liturgy, or lead the guests in praying the Holy Rosary, according to the wishes of the family.

Flowers. Flowers may not be placed in the sanctuary or on the casket during the Funeral. Flowers may be placed in the narthex of the church before the Mass begins. Please, note, no lilies are permitted due to a Priest’s serious allergy.

Pictures and Other Remembrances. Pictures of the deceased may not be placed in the church. However, they may be placed in the narthex. In addition, families may set up a table in the narthex before the funeral, with a guest book, pictures and other items of remembrance. This should be coordinated with the Parish Office.

Reception after the Funeral or Internment. Upon request a reception may be held in our Parish Hall after the interment if the facilities are available. If the interment is to take place on another day the reception may take place immediately after the Funeral Mass. The family should discuss this with the Parish Office as soon as possible before the Funeral.

Fees, Donations, Honoraria, etc.. There is no fee to have a Funeral Mass at St. Raymond’s, but the following should be considered:

- Families must pay for the services of the **musicians and cantors** (including those provided by St. Raymond’s). The amount of these fees usually range between \$200 and \$300, and can be discussed in detail with our Music Director. Arrangements can be made if the family cannot afford these fees.
- The family may make a voluntary gift to the church. A donation of between \$100.00 to \$500 is customary, but any offering sincerely given is gratefully accepted, and *none is required*.
- We recommend a gift of at least \$10 for each Altar Servers, but none is required.
- Although many families freely choose to make a monetary gift to the celebrant, this is *not at all required or expected*.