
Guidelines for *speaking in remembrance of the dead*

A. HOMILIES AND EULOGIES AT FUNERALS

The Order of Christian Funerals (OCF) instructs that *a brief homily based on the readings is always given after the gospel reading at the funeral liturgy, and may also be given after the readings at the vigil service; but there is never to be a eulogy.* (OCF 27)

This means that a eulogy is never to replace the homily at a Funeral Mass or within the Liturgy of the Word celebrated as a Vigil Service. However, there is provision for words of remembrance elsewhere in the funeral rites.

B. THE PLACE FOR WORDS OF REMEMBRANCE WITHIN THE FUNERAL RITES

The Order of Christian Funerals provides that, at a Funeral Mass, *a member or a friend of the family may speak in remembrance of the deceased following the Prayer after Communion but before the Final Commendation begins* (OCF 170). If the funeral is celebrated outside Mass, this may be done after the Lord's Prayer *before the final commendation begins* (OCF 197).

Likewise, at a Vigil Service, *a member or a friend of the family may speak in remembrance of the deceased after the Concluding Prayer and before the Blessing and Dismissal* (OCF 80).

Finally, at the Committal Service at the cemetery or crematorium, it may be appropriate to have a member or a friend of the family speak in remembrance of the dead after the Committal and before the Intercessions and Concluding Rite.

In summary, the proper time for a layperson to speak is:

- Vigil Service: after the Concluding Prayer, before the Blessing and Dismissal
- Funeral Mass: after the Prayer after Communion, before the Final Commendation
- Funeral outside Mass: after the Lord's Prayer, before the Final Commendation
- Committal Service: after the Prayer of Committal, before the Intercessions

C. GUIDELINES FOR HOMILISTS

Funerals are important moments when the homilist can proclaim the Good News and focus the attention of the mourners on the person of Jesus Christ, Who is the Resurrection and the Life. Thus the Church exhorts its preachers:

Attentive to the grief of those present, the homilist should dwell on God's compassionate love and on the paschal mystery of the Lord, as proclaimed in the Scripture readings. The homilist should also help the members of the assembly to understand that the mystery of God's love and the mystery of Jesus' victorious death and resurrection were present in the life and death of the deceased, and that these mysteries are active in their own lives as well. Through the homily, members of the family and community should receive consolation and strength to face the death of one of their members with a hope nourished by the saving word of God. Laypersons who preside at the funeral rites give an instruction on the readings (OCF 27).

D. GUIDELINES FOR LAY SPEAKERS

The following may assist parishes and funeral directors to develop clear and helpful pastoral practices in guiding those who 'speak in remembrance of the dead:'

- Only one person should speak at the Funeral Mass or Funeral Liturgy outside Mass. Others may speak at the Vigil Service or Committal Service.
- The reflection should be brief: no more than 3 – 5 minutes (one typed page). Speakers should be reminded of factors such as:
 - »» the time involved in travelling from church to cemetery/crematorium
 - »» the schedule of the cemetery/crematorium, which may have several services that day
 - »» the need of some in the assembly to return to work or other responsibilities.
- The reflection should be prepared beforehand, and ideally reviewed with the priest or presiding minister beforehand, to avoid undue length or embarrassing situations.
- Priests should suggest that storytelling, anecdotes, poems, songs etc. can well form part of the Vigil Service or Committal Service, or better be used in a domestic situation.

The following suggestions may assist the bereaved to prepare the words of remembrance:

- The words of remembrance should be about the deceased person's human qualities (including their life of faith), and how these qualities can inspire the hearers.
- The speaker should speak honestly and compassionately, reflecting the

life and circumstances of the deceased.

- It is neither necessary nor desirable that the speaker attempt to give a life history of the deceased. Instead, an itemised obituary of the deceased person's life history might be included in a booklet that is prepared for the funeral, rather than read at the Funeral Mass.
- While only one person will speak at the Funeral Mass, the reflection could well be a summation of remembrances gathered from family members and friends.
- It is useful to rehearse the words aloud to ensure that the hearers are given a clear message about the deceased person, and that the speaker is able to deliver the reflection well.

Five questions on **'speaking in remembrance of the dead'**

1. What is the difference between a 'eulogy' and 'speaking in remembrance of the dead?'

A eulogy recounts some or all of the significant events in the life of the deceased. Words of remembrance do not attempt to give a biography, but to share some insight into the faith and values of the deceased as seen in one or two examples from his/her life. A eulogy by its very nature tends to be lengthy, while words of remembrance are brief.

2. Does this mean that all eulogies are forbidden at Catholic funerals?

No. A eulogy is only forbidden at the funeral Mass, in accord with no. 141 in the *Order of Christian Funerals (OCF)*, which states: *A brief homily based on the readings should always be given at the funeral liturgy, but never any kind of eulogy.*

However, no. 170 of the OCF does permit 'words of remembrance' at the end of Mass: *A member or a friend of the family may speak in remembrance of the deceased before the final commendation begins.*

Both eulogies and words of remembrance may be offered at a vigil service on the eve of the funeral, or at the cemetery or crematorium. These are also the appropriate places/times for playing favourite secular tunes or showing slides or PowerPoint® displays of photos of the deceased.

3. What other aspects of the Guidelines are significant?

The words of remembrance:

~ are delivered after the Prayer after Communion and before the Final

Commendation;

~ are to be brief: no more than 3 to 5 minutes;

~ are to be prepared in advance and given to the priest for review in advance;

~ are limited to one person.

4. Are there any exceptions?

There may be particular circumstances that would require more than one speaker, for example, a state funeral. In such a case a certain protocol of allowing a member of the government, member of the opposition, and perhaps others is to be expected. But normally other speakers should be directed to speak at the vigil, interment or cremation.

5. Why are the Guidelines necessary?

For several reasons:

- ❖ some Catholic funerals are losing their essential nature as an act of worship of God and prayer for the soul of the deceased, and becoming settings for a series of eulogies;
- ❖ while the funeral is a time of support for the bereaved family and friends, there should also be consideration of other factors: people taking time off work to attend, funeral directors having difficulty with scheduling multiple funerals on a given day, parishes having need of their churches for other liturgies, etc.;
- ❖ if one speaker becomes emotional and has great difficulty delivering his/ her words, the situation becomes uncomfortable for the assembly and often results in more grief for the bereaved at a time in the liturgy when they have hopefully been lifted a little beyond grief through the Eucharistic celebration; this possibility is compounded when there are several speakers;
- ❖ it has happened that, when there are several speakers, some in the congregation think that anyone is free to walk up to the sanctuary and speak, resulting in very lengthy funerals;
- ❖ on not a few occasions, inappropriate remarks glossing over the deceased's proclivities (drinking prowess, romantic conquests, etc.) or about the Church (attacking its moral teachings) have been made at funeral Masses, embarrassing the priest, the family and the congregation and becoming the focus of the service.