

# CATHOLIC FUNERAL MASSES AT ST. MARY OF THE ASSUMPTION

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St. Mary's Park City • 1505 White Pine Canyon Road, Park City, UT 84060 • (435) 649-9676



*Letter from the Pastor*  
*Frequently Asked Questions*  
*Parish Guidelines*  
*and More*

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# A LETTER FROM THE PASTOR

**Dear Brothers and Sisters,**

First of all, let me say how truly sorry I am for your loss. Losing someone you love is never easy, whether expected or sudden, death always feels like it tears a hole in our lives. Please know that our whole parish is praying with you and for you in this time of grief.

Now, at moments like this, families often ask: “Father, why do we need a Funeral Mass? Can’t we just do something simple? Maybe gather in the mountains, scatter ashes, and share some stories?” It’s a natural question. And as your pastor, I’d like to share why the Church insists, lovingly but firmly, that the Funeral Mass and Christian burial are not just old traditions, but profound gifts of faith.

## 1. WE ARE NOT JUST SPIRITS, WE ARE BODY AND SOUL

St. Augustine reminds us: *“Man is not a soul only, nor a body only, but both soul and body”* (Letter 187). In other words, your loved one’s body mattered. It hugged you, cooked meals, held hands, walked to Mass. That body was also a temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 6:19). When the Church surrounds the body with prayer, incense, and holy water, it’s our way of saying: *“This body is sacred. God will raise it up on the last day”* (John 6:40).

Think of it this way: if you borrowed a fancy tuxedo from a friend, you wouldn’t return it crumpled in a garbage bag. You’d fold it carefully and bring it back with respect. In the same way, we don’t just “toss” the body or scatter it like confetti. We reverently lay it to rest, because it is destined for glory (Phil 3:20–21).

## 2. THE FUNERAL MASS IS MORE THAN “SAYING GOODBYE”

Yes, funerals bring family together, and yes, it’s good to share memories. But the Funeral Mass is something deeper. Here, Christ Himself makes present His death and resurrection in the Eucharist. When we celebrate Mass for the dead, we place our loved one’s soul on the altar along with Christ’s perfect sacrifice. St. Monica (St. Augustine’s mother) told her sons before she died: *“Lay this body anywhere. Let not the care of it trouble you. Only this I ask: that you remember me at the altar of the Lord”* (Confessions IX, 11).

This echoes St. Paul’s teaching: *“If we have died with Christ, we shall also live with Him”* (2 Tim 2:11), and, *“do this in memory of me”* (Luke 22:19). No tribute, no poem, no slideshow can compare with the prayers of the Mass, where heaven and earth unite.

## 3. BURIAL IS AN ACT OF HOPE

From the earliest Christians, burying the dead was not just a custom, it was a work of mercy. The Catechism reminds us: *“The bodies of the dead must be treated with respect and charity, in faith and hope of the Resurrection”* (CCC 2300). Catacombs under Rome are silent witnesses to this, Christians risked their lives to bury their dead, not scatter them, because they believed in the resurrection of the flesh.

As Tertullian wrote around A.D. 200: “We Christians are not afraid of the grave, for we know that the flesh will rise again.” This is why Scripture tells us: “Those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life” (Dan 12:2). So when we bury, we’re not just covering over death. We’re planting a seed (1 Cor 15:42–44). **The cemetery is not “the end”, it’s God’s garden of resurrection.**

#### 4. BUT FATHER, WHAT ABOUT CREMATION?

The Church permits cremation (since 1963), but only if it’s not chosen to deny the resurrection (*Ad resurgendum cum Christo*, 2016). And, here’s where people sometimes frown at me, ashes are not meant to sit on the mantelpiece next to grandma’s old clock. Nor should they be scattered on a golf course (even if Dad loved golf). Why? Because ashes, like the body, belong in a sacred place. Scripture reminds us that even in death, “*the dead shall be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed*” (1 Cor 15:52). **A cemetery keeps your loved one within the communion of the Church, where others can visit, pray, and remember.** As Pope Benedict XVI put it: “*The Christian cemetery is a place of rest and of hope.*”

#### 5. SO WHY THE FUNERAL MASS?

Because it’s not just about remembering, it’s about redeeming. The Mass is the greatest prayer we can offer for our loved ones. St. John Chrysostom preached: “*Let us help and commemorate them. If Job’s sons were purified by their father’s sacrifice, why should we doubt that our offerings for the dead bring them consolation?*” (Homily on 1 Corinthians 41:5).

This reflects St. Paul’s words: “*I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all*” (1 Tim 2:1). And Judas Maccabeus, in the Old Testament, “*took up a collection for the dead, that they might be delivered from their sin*” (2 Macc 12:44–45). That’s why, when we lose someone, the best thing we can do is bring them to the altar, where Christ’s sacrifice is offered for their eternal salvation.

#### 6. AND YES, LAUGHTER BELONGS TOO

I sometimes joke with families: “If I die, please don’t just scatter me in Walmart’s parking lot. Bury me like a Christian, then go eat some cake in the hall. But first, give me a Funeral Mass, I’ll need all the prayers I can get!” Humor aside, this is serious. One day, every one of us will want someone to pray for us, to remember us at the altar, to commend us into God’s mercy. And we take courage in Jesus’ words: “*I am the Resurrection and the Life, whoever believes in me, even if he dies, will live*” (John 11:25).

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Dear friends, I know funerals can feel overwhelming. But I assure you, choosing the Funeral Mass and Catholic burial is not about rules, it’s about love — love for God, love for the person you’ve lost, and love for the hope we share in Christ. On behalf of the parish, I promise to walk with you through this journey. Together, let us commend your loved one to the Lord, who promised: “*Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted*” (Matt 5:4).

**With prayer and sympathy,**

*Rev. Arokia Dass David*

*Pastor*

# FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

The Catholic funeral rites are a profound expression of faith in the Resurrection of Christ and our hope of eternal life. To help families and visitors understand the Church's practice, here are answers to frequently asked questions.

## 1. DOES THE CHURCH ALLOW CREMATION?

Yes. While the Church strongly prefers burial, cremation is permitted if it is not chosen as a denial of Christian teaching on the resurrection of the body. The ashes must be laid to rest in a sacred place such as a cemetery, columbarium, or parish memorial garden. **They may not be kept at home, divided among family, scattered, or made into jewelry.**

• *References: CCC 2300–2301; Ad resurgendum cum Christo (2016), nos. 3–5*

## 2. CAN WE KEEP ASHES AT HOME OR SCATTER THEM AFTER CREMATION?

No. The cremated remains must be laid to rest in a sacred place such as a cemetery, columbarium, or parish memorial garden.

- Keeping ashes at home is not permitted, except in rare cases with permission from the bishop.
- Scattering ashes on land, sea, or air, or dividing them among family, is forbidden.
- Ashes may not be placed in jewelry, keepsakes, or household objects.

• *References: Ad resurgendum cum Christo (2016), nos. 5–7; CCC 2300–2301; CIC can. 1176 §3*

## 3. WHAT IF ASHES ARE SCATTERED? CAN A CATHOLIC FUNERAL STILL BE HELD?

The Catholic Church requires that cremated remains be placed in a sacred place such as a cemetery or columbarium. Scattering ashes, keeping them at home, or dividing them is not permitted.

- If scattering **is chosen as a rejection of the Catholic faith** (for example, to deny belief in the resurrection of the body), **then a Catholic funeral must be denied.**
- If scattering is done **out of misunderstanding or cultural custom** (not as a denial of faith), the funeral Mass may still be celebrated. In these cases, the priest will encourage the family to bring the remains to a sacred place for proper interment.
- Even if mistakes are made, the Church continues to pray for the deceased, and pastoral care of the family remains a priority.

#### 4. CAN NON-CATHOLICS PARTICIPATE IN THE FUNERAL MASS?

Yes. Everyone is welcome to pray with us at the Funeral Mass. However, only practicing Catholics in a state of grace should receive Holy Communion. Non-Catholics and Catholics not receiving Communion are encouraged to remain seated in prayer or come forward with arms crossed for a blessing.

• *References: CCC 1400–1401; USCCB Guidelines for the Reception of Communion*

#### 5. CAN WE CHOOSE OUR OWN MUSIC FOR THE MASS?

Yes and no. Music must be liturgical and sacred, in keeping with the Church's tradition (e.g., hymns, psalms, or settings of the Mass). Secular or popular songs are not permitted during the liturgy, but they may be used at the vigil, reception, or family gatherings.

• *References: Sing to the Lord: Music in Divine Worship (USCCB, 2007), nos. 116–120; GIRM 39–41*

#### 6. CAN WE DISPLAY PHOTOS OR VIDEOS IN CHURCH?

A single photo of the deceased and modest floral arrangements are permitted in the church. Slideshows, large displays, or videos should be reserved for the reception hall.

• *References: OCF, no. 386. WHAT ABOUT BEHAVIOR IN THE CHURCH?*

The church is a place of prayer. Please:

- Do not chew gum, eat, or drink in the church.
- Silence cell phones and do not make or answer calls.
- Maintain silence and reverence before, during, and after the liturgy.
- Socializing should be done in the hall, not in the church.

*References: GIRM 45–46; CCC 1186*

#### 7. CAN NON-PRACTICING CATHOLICS HAVE A CATHOLIC FUNERAL?

Yes. The Church prays for all her children. Even if someone has been away from active practice, a Catholic funeral may still be celebrated. Families should meet with the pastor to discuss the situation and plan the rites.

*References: OCF, nos. 4–5; CIC (Code of Canon Law), can. 1176 §1–2*

#### 8. IS THERE A COST FOR A FUNERAL AT THE PARISH?

The parish does not charge for sacraments, but families are asked to make an offering to support the church and cover associated costs (music, servers, etc.). Details are available through the parish office.

*References: CIC can. 848*

*Continued on next page.*

## 9. WHAT IS THE ORDER OF CATHOLIC FUNERAL RITES?

1. Vigil (Wake/Viewing) – Prayer, Scripture, and remembrance.
2. Funeral Mass – The Church’s highest prayer of commendation.
3. Committal – Prayers at the cemetery or mausoleum.

*References: OCF, nos. 46–97 (Vigil); 128–203 (Funeral Mass); 204–233 (Committal)*

## 10. CAN WE HAVE A EULOGY DURING THE FUNERAL MASS?

No. The Catholic Funeral Mass is focused on Christ’s victory over death and prayer for the deceased. Personal tributes or eulogies are not permitted during Mass. Families are welcome to share remembrances during the vigil, at the reception, or at the graveside.

*References: Order of Christian Funerals (OCF), nos. 27, 141; GIRM 65–66*

## 12. CAN A CATHOLIC WHO DIED BY SUICIDE RECEIVE A CATHOLIC FUNERAL?

Yes. The Church entrusts every soul to God’s infinite mercy. In the past, funerals were sometimes denied in such cases, but today the Church recognizes the complexity of mental illness and prays for those who die by suicide.

*References: CCC 2282–2283; OCF, no. 8*

## 13. CAN A FUNERAL MASS BE CELEBRATED ON A SUNDAY OR HOLY DAY?

Normally, funerals are not celebrated on Sundays or Holy Days of Obligation, since the parish gathers for the Sunday liturgy. Exceptions may occur in grave necessity and with the bishop’s permission.

*References: CIC can. 1180; GIRM 380*

## 14. WHAT VESTMENTS DOES THE PRIEST WEAR AT FUNERALS?

The priest may wear black, violet (purple), or white vestments. Black emphasizes mourning and hope, violet emphasizes penance and Christian hope, and white emphasizes baptismal dignity and resurrection. The choice often reflects local tradition and family preference.

*References: GIRM 346; OCF, no. 39*

## 15. CAN THE CASKET BE OPEN DURING THE FUNERAL MASS?

No. The casket remains closed in church, both for reverence and to keep focus on Christ’s Paschal Mystery. If the family wishes, an open casket viewing may take place before the vigil or before the Mass begins.

*References: OCF, no. 134*

*Continued on next page.*

## 16. CAN WE HAVE A FUNERAL MASS FOR SOMEONE WHO WASN'T CATHOLIC?

If the person was not Catholic but had a connection to the faith and the family requests it, the pastor may seek permission from the bishop. Normally, non-Catholics receive prayers at an ecumenical or graveside service.

*References: CIC can. 1183 §3*

## 17. CAN A MASS BE OFFERED IF THE BODY IS NOT PRESENT?

Yes. A **Memorial Mass** can be celebrated when the body or cremated remains are not present (for example, if burial has already occurred in another country).

*References: OCF, nos. 405–411*

## 18. HOW SOON AFTER DEATH SHOULD THE FUNERAL TAKE PLACE?

Ideally within a few days, balancing the needs of the family, availability of the church, and burial arrangements.

*References: Pastoral practice, OCF introduction*



# PARISH FUNERAL GUIDELINES

## ST. MARY OF THE ASSUMPTION - PARK CITY, UTAH



The Funeral Rites of the Church (Vigil, Funeral Mass, and Committal) are moments of solemn prayer and Christian hope. Out of reverence for the sacred liturgy and one another, please observe the following:

### I. FUNERAL MASS

#### WHAT IS PERMITTED IN CHURCH

**Sacred Liturgy Only:** The Funeral Mass follows the Roman Catholic Rite of Christian Funerals. Scripture readings, prayers, homily, and sacred music form the heart of this celebration.

**Liturgical Music:** Hymns and responses should be taken from the Church's liturgical tradition. Families may request approved hymns, coordinated with the parish music director.

**Reception of Holy Communion:** Practicing Catholics who are properly disposed are welcome to receive Holy Communion. Those not receiving may remain in place or come forward with arms crossed for a blessing.

#### WHAT IS NOT PERMITTED IN CHURCH:

**Eulogies or Personal Tributes:** These are not part of the Catholic liturgy. They may be shared at the vigil, graveside, or reception hall.

**Secular Music or Readings:** Popular songs, poetry, or non-scriptural readings are not permitted during Mass.

**Food, Drink, or Chewing Gum:** Please do not bring food, drink, or chewing gum into the church.

**Cell Phones and Socializing:** Phones must be silenced. Please do not make or answer calls inside the church. Maintain a prayerful silence before, during, and after Mass.

**Unauthorized Photography or Filming:** Discouraged unless arranged with the pastor.

## RESPECT FOR THE SACRED

The church is the House of God, where Christ is present in the Blessed Sacrament. Please enter and conduct yourself with reverence.

Dress modestly and respectfully, mindful that we gather to worship God and commend a soul to His mercy.

If you are not a practicing Catholic, please do not receive Holy Communion. Your respectful presence and prayer are a true gift.

## II. VIGIL IN THE CHURCH

The Vigil for the Deceased is a time of prayer, Scripture, and remembrance before the Funeral Mass. If held in the church, the following norms apply:

### WHAT IS PERMITTED

**Structure of the Vigil:** Opening prayer, Scripture, homily/reflection, intercessions, and concluding prayer according to the Order of Christian Funerals.

**Music:** Sacred music may be included, coordinated with the parish music director.

**Sharing of Memories:** Brief remembrances or eulogies (2–3 speakers, 3–5 minutes each) may be offered. *Eulogies are not given from the pulpit (ambo); a movable stand will be provided in front of the sanctuary.*

**Rosary or Devotions:** The Rosary, Divine Mercy Chaplet, or other Catholic prayers may be prayed as part of or following the vigil.

### WHAT IS NOT PERMITTED

**Secular Music or Readings:** Popular songs, poems, or non-scriptural readings may not replace the prayers and Scripture.

**Excessive Length:** The vigil should not exceed one hour.

*Even during the vigil: Phones must be silenced. Please do not talk on the phone or carry on conversations inside the church. The church should remain a place of silence and prayer; socializing belongs in the hall. Also, no food, drink, or chewing gum.*

## PRACTICAL CONSIDERATIONS

**Schedule:** Must be arranged with the parish office.

**Leader of Prayer:** Normally led by a priest or deacon; a trained lay minister may lead if arranged.

**Candles, Displays, and Photos:** One photo of the deceased and modest floral arrangements are permitted. No slideshows or large displays in the sanctuary.

**Casket Placement:** If present, the casket is placed near the sanctuary and remains closed.

## III. COMMITTAL AT THE CEMETERY

The priest or deacon will lead prayers as the body is committed to its resting place. This is a brief but solemn moment, entrusting the deceased to God's care.

### FINAL NOTE

The Funeral Rites are above all a prayer of Christian hope in the Resurrection of Christ. By observing these guidelines with silence, reverence, and respect, you help preserve the dignity of the liturgy and honor your loved one in the most fitting way.



# WHY A CATHOLIC FUNERAL?

Dear Friends,

When we lose a loved one, our hearts are heavy. On behalf of the parish, please accept my sympathy and prayers. In times of grief, families often wonder: “Why should we have a Funeral Mass and Catholic burial? Can’t we just keep things simple?”

Let me share just a few reasons why the Funeral Mass is such a gift.

## **1. Because the body matters.**

Our loved one’s body is a temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 6:19). It hugged, worked, and loved. At the Funeral Mass, we honor that body and commend it to God, trusting Jesus’ promise: “I will raise them up on the last day” (John 6:40).

## **2. Because the Mass is more than memories.**

The Funeral Mass is not just “saying goodbye,” it is Christ Himself offering His death and resurrection for the soul of our loved one. St. Monica once told her sons: “Only this I ask, that you remember me at the altar of the Lord” (Confessions IX, 11).

## **3. Because burial is an act of hope.**

When we bury the dead, we are not “covering over,” we are planting a seed. St. Paul says: “What is sown is perishable, what is raised is imperishable” (1 Cor 15:42). The cemetery is not the end, it is God’s garden of resurrection.

## **4. Because prayer helps our loved ones.**

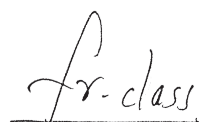
St. John Chrysostom preached: “Let us help and commemorate them... our offerings for the dead bring them consolation” (Homily on 1 Corinthians 41:5). No tribute or poem is greater than the prayers of the Mass, where heaven and earth unite.

And yes, a little humor: I often tell families, “If I die, please don’t scatter me in Walmart’s parking lot. Bury me like a Christian, then go eat some cake in the hall. But first, give me a Funeral Mass — I’ll need all the prayers I can get!”

## **Final Word**

The Funeral Mass is not about rules, it’s about love — love for God, love for the person we’ve lost, and love for the hope we share in Christ.

In Christ’s mercy,



*Fr. Arokia Dass David*  
Pastor



1505 White Pine Canyon Road  
Park City, UT 84060  
(435) 649-9676  
[info@stmarysparkcity.com](mailto:info@stmarysparkcity.com)  
Office Hours: Monday - Thursday 8:30 AM - 5:00 PM

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