

# 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*

