

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).

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,

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Pastor