

FUNERALS AT THE OXFORD ORATORY



WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

When someone we love dies, there are many things to arrange, and the most important is the person's funeral. For Catholics, a **Requiem Mass** is offered as the best way of showing our continued love for the deceased.

What does the Church teach about death?

Death is a consequence of **Original Sin** – if we had not sinned then our bodies would go straight to **Heaven** as Our Lord's did in the Ascension and Our Lady's at the Assumption. However, since Christ has conquered death on the Cross, our sorrow is tempered by hope in the **Resurrection**. We trust that on the last day our mortal bodies will rise again to be with Our Lord.

Our sins have been forgiven in Baptism and Confession, but the effects of sin still remain, and this is why we still have to undergo **Purgatory** – the love of God working to cleanse us and make us able to enter into God's presence. We can help the faithful departed to pass more swiftly through **Purgatory** by our prayers. The greatest prayer we can offer is the **Holy Sacrifice of the Mass**. A Mass for the dead is called a **Requiem** – meaning a Mass offered that they may rest in peace.

These notes are intended to help the families or friends of those arranging a Requiem Mass in our church.

What to do

The first step is to speak to the Funeral Directors. Tell them that the deceased person is a Catholic and that you wish to arrange the Requiem Mass at the Oratory. They will then contact a priest and fix a time and day. The Funeral Directors deal with all the costs.

Burial or Cremation?

Burial has always been the tradition of the Church, because it expresses more fully the belief in the Resurrection of the Body. However, cremation is permitted, provided that it is not a deliberate statement contrary to Christian belief.

It is a common Catholic practice that the body comes into Church the evening before the funeral. If you wish this to happen, you should tell the Funeral Directors.

Order of Service

The texts of the Requiem Mass are laid down in the *Roman Missal*. There are some choices which you may make: the readings and the hymns (if desired).

You may wish to have an Order of Service printed for the funeral. The Funeral Directors can do this, but you should have it approved by the priest first.

The wording on the front of the Order of Service should always be “Requiem Mass for the Repose of the Soul of...” Phrases such as “Celebration of the Life of ...” or “Thanksgiving for the Life of...” do not reflect Christian belief and should NOT be used. Our principal purpose at a Requiem is to pray for the deceased person.

Readings

The priest can advise you in the choice of readings for the Mass. Only Scriptural readings are permitted. If family members or friends wish to read during the Mass they should meet the priest beforehand so that he can ensure that they know what to do.

The *General Instruction on the Roman Missal* states that, “At the Funeral Mass there should, as a rule, be a short homily, but never a eulogy of any kind.”

The priest will preach during the Requiem Mass, and he may make some brief remarks about the life of the person. However the main purpose of the homily is to preach the Gospel and to instil in us hope in the Resurrection.

It is better that no extra comments are made during the Mass. However, if the priest permits then **one** person may make a brief statement about the deceased before Mass begins or at the end of Mass. This should last no more than three or four minutes, and the text must be shown to the priest beforehand.

Music

Only sacred music may be used in church and recorded music is never permitted.

You may wish to have hymns during the Mass, but there is no obligation to do so. If you think that there will not be a good participation by the congregation it is better not to have any hymns. You should discuss the choice of hymns with the priest and any hymns chosen must be in a hymn book used at the Oratory. Whether or not you have any hymns, the priest can arrange for an organist to play.

Symbols used in a Requiem Mass

Black Vestments are worn as a symbol of grief. Unbleached candles stand on the altar and may stand around the coffin. The altar is dressed in violet.

The coffin is sprinkled with holy water as a reminder of Baptism, and the Paschal Candle may also stand nearby as a symbol of the Resurrection.

The coffin should usually have a crucifix on it. It may be covered with the pall, which is decorated with the Cross. One flower arrangement may also stand on the coffin, but other items should not go there, as they would distract from the Christian symbols and make too much of a distinction between different people.

Burial

After the Mass the coffin is taken to the cemetery (or crematorium). There is then a brief service of committal.

Masses for the Dead

Our faith tells us that our relationship with someone who has died is not at an end and we can continue to help them by our prayers and sacrifices. We should ensure that Masses are said for our loved ones who have died. Masses can be arranged through the Oratory Porters' Lodge.



The Oxford Oratory
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