

Catholic Cemeteries Parish Engagement

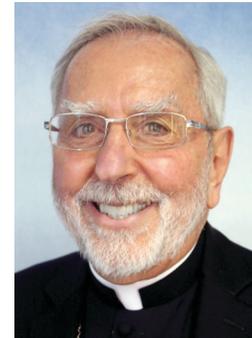
We Believe in the Resurrection

Catechesis on the beauty of the funeral liturgy for children, teens and adults



Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ Jesus,

The Catholic Cemetery Conference (CCC) strives to provide information, training, best practices and guidance for Catholic Cemeteries throughout the United States and Canada. CCC's mission is to promote, to educate and to inculcate a culture of Catholic burial. Burying the dead is a Corporal Work of Mercy and an essential part of the Church's mission.



We live in the hope of the resurrection promised by Christ who spoke of the human person as a temple of the Holy Spirit. For that reason care and respect for the deceased matters greatly. The Church strives to assist grieving families in laying their loved ones to rest and provides support and comfort to the family and loved ones of the deceased.

These materials and videos presented by the CCC spell out what that care and respect needs to look like through the whole burial process. From pre-planning for death to the Vigil, to the Funeral Mass and the Rite of Committal, these materials and videos provide information on how Catholic Cemeteries accompany families in this difficult time.

Likewise, lesson plans are presented in order to introduce children and young people to the Rites of Christian Burial, outlining how and why the Church treats the human body in death with the utmost respect and dignity.

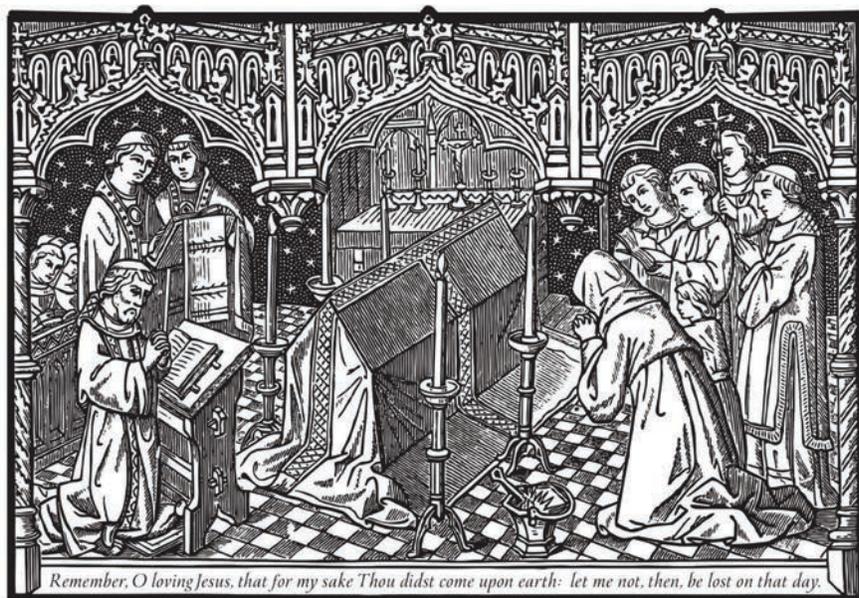
The burial or entombment of the deceased person's body or cremated remains is central to the Church's mission. The hope of CCC is that these materials will assist bishops, priests, Catholic cemeterians and pastoral educators to inform our Catholic people of the Church's approach to death and burial of loved ones.

Choicest blessings!

Sincerely yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink, which appears to read "Gerald Kicanas".

Most Rev. Gerald F. Kicanas
Episcopal Advisor for the Catholic Cemetery Conference
Bishop Emeritus of the Diocese of Tucson



Nihil Obstat

Most Rev. Gerald F. Kicanas
Bishop Emeritus,
Diocese of Tucson
Episcopal Moderator of the
Catholic Cemetery Conference
April 2020

Imprimatur

Most Rev. Gerald F. Kicanas
Bishop Emeritus,
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Why this resource?

Most children will encounter death sometime during their childhood and adolescence. The mystery of the loss of a loved one and the questions and emotions that we experience when confronted with suffering and death only make sense in light of the resurrection. God's revelation to man about our final end and His plan for our salvation is central to our Catholic faith.

While there are many fine catechetical resources for children and teens, many do not adequately address death and dying nor explain the Catholic funeral liturgy and its role in providing grace for the deceased and comfort to the mourning. Faithful to its obligation to further evangelize the faithful, Catholic Cemeteries and Funeral Homes seeks to serve the catechetical mission of each parish by providing this free resource to assist pastors and catechists in forming children and families in deeper knowledge of and appreciation for the beauty of the funeral rites of the Church and the truth of the Resurrection.

How to use?

The following are age-appropriate lesson plans prepared by a team of experienced catechists that can serve as supplemental formation to your existing catechetical curriculum. The lesson plans follow the Ecclesial Method (Preparation, Proclamation, Explanation, Application and Celebration) and can be modified to meet specific parish needs. Each grade level provides a 30-45 minute lesson focusing on a different theme and can be used each successive year to increase your student's knowledge of this aspect of the Faith.

Death and the Resurrection

Please read before the lesson to prepare

Most students will have experienced celebrating Good Friday and Easter and likely know the story of Jesus' death and resurrection. The resurrection from the dead is one of the central tenants of our faith, and our home in communion with God was revealed most fully through Jesus Christ. Many students will have also likely experienced the death of a family member.

This session is meant to reaffirm and proclaim the good news that Jesus has come to save us and raise us to eternal life.

Below are some Bible and Catechism quotations that will help you prepare for this lesson.

Bible Quotations

“For if we have grown into union with Him through a death like His, we shall also be united with Him in the resurrection.” – *Rom 6:5*

“Our savior Christ Jesus, who destroyed death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.” – *2 Tim 1:10*

“In my Father's house there are many dwelling places . . . I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back again and take you to myself, so that where I am you also may be.” – *John 14:2,3*



Catechism Quotations

Article II of the Creed – “I believe in the resurrection.” – *Paragraphs 988-1019*

CCC 989 – “We firmly believe, and hence we hope that, just as Christ is truly risen from the dead and lives forever, so after death the righteous will live forever with the risen Christ and He will raise them up on the last day.”

CCC 991 – “Belief in the resurrection of the dead has been an essential element of the Christian faith from its beginnings. ‘The confidence of Christians is the resurrection of the dead; believing this we live.’”

Opening Prayer

Suggested prayer, modify as needed

Dear Lord, You came so that we might know Your great love for us, save us from the darkness of sin and sadness. You give us joy and prepare a beautiful home for us in heaven. We ask that You bless us today as we learn about Your death and resurrection and what it means for us all. And we pray for Your mercy on all who have died and gone before us, especially our family and friends. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

1) Proclamation

God has created each one of us to know Him, to love Him and to serve Him. He loves us so much that He wants us to know unending joy with Him and all the angels and saints in heaven, our beautiful home.



2) Explanation

For this age group, we recommend that the central teaching be done after a conversation with the students from which the most important points can be elaborated on.

Suggested question prompts:

1) **Q.** Who knows the story of Jesus' death and resurrection?

A. Jesus died and on the 3rd day He rose again. The word resurrection means that after we die, we will rise up again. We will come back to life . . .

2) **Q.** Who knows where we go when we die?

A. God loves us so much He wants us to be with Him and sent His only begotten Son Jesus to save us from sin and death, so that we might live with Him in heaven . . .

3) **Q.** Who knows what we call the special celebration we have when somebody dies?

A. A funeral. A funeral is a special time when we commend the person who has died to the mercy of God and, as Christians, pray for them

that through their faith in Jesus Christ they will share in His resurrection. The body or cremated remains of the person are then taken to a cemetery where they are buried or interred until the day when Jesus returns in glory.

4) **Q.** When does the Church pray for those who have died?

A. At Mass, during funerals, at cemeteries, and at home or in church, we pray for our family and friends who have died and those who are about to die. On All Saints Day on November 1st, we ask for the prayers of all those saints who are alive with Jesus in Heaven. On All Souls Day we pray in a special way for all those members of our families who have died . . .

5) Q. How do we pray for those who have died?

A. We can pray at Mass for our family members who have died or when we say our prayers at night. We can remember them anytime we pray.

Teaching

Bible Reading

- Let's listen to a reading from the Bible when Jesus talks about the resurrection.
- Read John 14:1-6 and facilitate a brief discussion on the story.

Catechesis (main points to cover)

- Jesus died on the cross and rose from the dead for us, and He went to prepare a place for us to live forever with Him and everyone else who is in heaven.
- Here on earth we learn to love God and follow Him so when our time on earth ends we can be with Him in heaven.
- In heaven everything that is broken in us by sin will be fixed, so that we can be exactly who God made us to be.
- When someone dies there is a special way of remembering and honoring them called a funeral, which prepares the person who died to enter into new and everlasting life with Jesus, and helps the family express their sadness and seek consolation in one another.



3) Application

Guided reflection and discussion

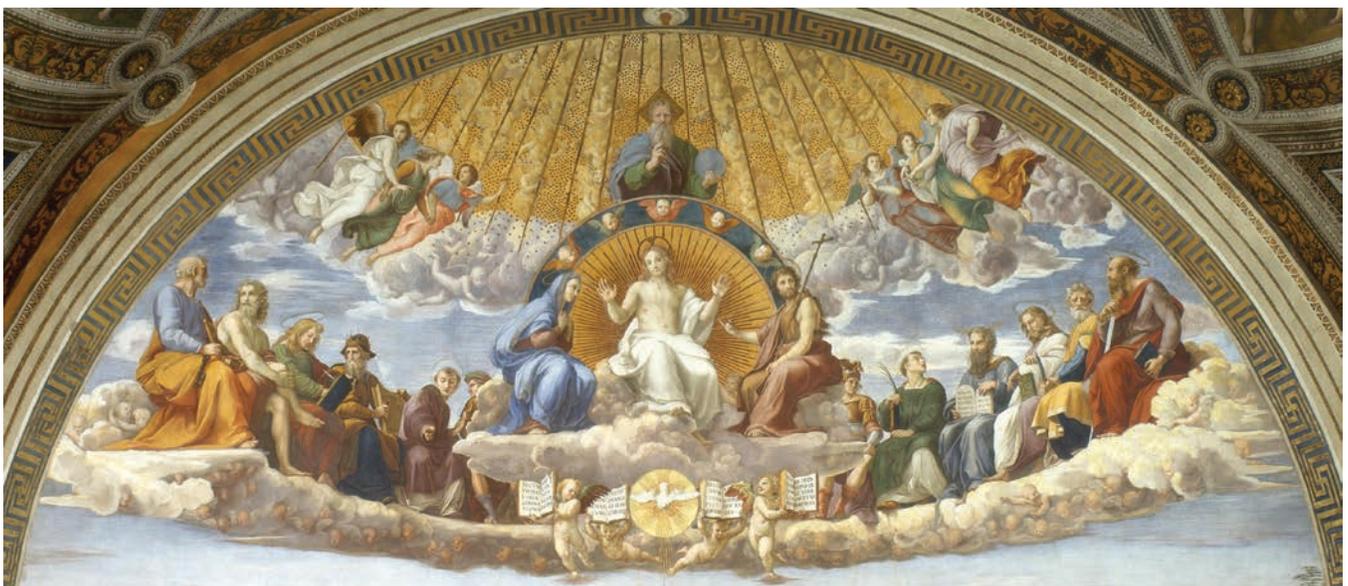
- This part of the lesson is meant to encourage kids to use their imagination about the mystery of heaven using the attached worksheet.
 - While heaven is ultimately a mystery for us now, that does not mean we cannot infer what heaven is like. Jesus talked about heaven, and many saints have described heaven. Kids may naturally have an inclination to what heaven is like.
- Prompt: Jesus loves us more than anything, right? He created us, He knows us by name, He made each of us different and special in our own way. Jesus has prepared a place for each one of us with Him in heaven. What do you imagine heaven is like? Use the paper below to draw a picture of what you think heaven would be like.
- After kids are finished drawing, have a discussion on their drawings and reinforce key points.
- Key points: In heaven . . .
 - We will be completely happy.
 - We will have perfect community.
 - There is no sadness, nothing will hurt.
 - There are no more tears.
 - We are one big family.
 - We will see all the saints and our family members who have died
 - We will see God face to face.



4) Celebration

Finish the lesson by reinforcing any key points and offering a concluding prayer inviting children to pray for any family and friends who have died, and those who have no one to pray for them.

What is heaven like? Use your imagination and draw a picture of what you think heaven is like. Who is there? What are people doing? What good things from our home on earth are better and more perfect in heaven?



Here is how a famous artist named Rafael imagined heaven. What do you think?

Praying for the Dead

Please read before the lesson to prepare

Most students will remember that we pray for the dead during the Mass. Praying for our deceased loved ones and hoping to encounter them in heaven is deeply ingrained in our humanity. As Christians, we commend the dead to the mercy of God, we remember and honor their memory, we pray for them that they may experience the love and mercy of God, and we ask for their intercession. Praying for the dead is a central aspect of our faith, and many students have likely prayed for a deceased love one during a funeral or on All Souls Day/Día de los Muertos.

This session is meant to reaffirm and encourage the practice of praying for the dead and to teach the special ways that we pray for the dead in the funeral liturgy and at each Mass during the prayers of the faithful.

Below are some Bible and Catechism quotes that will help you to prepare for this lesson.

Bible Quotations

St. Paul prays for his departed friend, “May the Lord grant him to find mercy from the Lord on that day.” – *2 Tim 1:18*

“For if he were not expecting that those who had fallen would rise again, it would have been superfluous and foolish to pray for the dead. But if he was looking to the splendid reward that is laid up for those who fall asleep in godliness, it was a holy and pious thought. Therefore he made atonement for the dead, that they might be delivered from their sin.” – *2 Maccabees 12: 39-45*



Catechism Quotations

CCC 958 – *Communion with the dead.* “In full consciousness of this communion of the whole Mystical Body of Jesus Christ, the Church in its pilgrim members, from the very earliest days of the Christian religion, has honored with great respect the memory of the dead; and ‘because it is a holy and a wholesome thought to pray for the dead that they may be loosed from their sins she offers her suffrages for them.’ Our prayer for them is capable not only of helping them, but also of making their intercession for us effective.”

CCC 1032 – “From the beginning the Church has honored the memory of the dead and offered prayers in suffrage for them, above all the Eucharistic sacrifice, so that, thus purified, they may attain the beatific vision of God. The Church also commends almsgiving, indulgences, and works of penance undertaken on behalf of the dead:

Let us help and commemorate them. If Job’s sons were purified by their father’s sacrifice, why would we doubt that our offerings for the dead bring them some consolation? Let us not hesitate to help those who have died and to offer our prayers for them.”

CCC 1055 – “By virtue of the ‘communion of saints,’ the Church commends the dead to God’s mercy and offers her prayers, especially the holy sacrifice of the Eucharist, on their behalf.”



Opening Prayer

Suggested prayer from catholic.org, modify to suit your use as needed

God our Father,
Your power brings us to birth,
Your providence guides our lives,
and by Your command we return to dust.

Lord, those who die still live in Your presence,
their lives change but do not end.
I pray in hope for my family,

relatives and friends,
and for all the dead known to You alone.

In company with Christ,
Who died and now lives,
may they rejoice in Your kingdom,
where all our tears are wiped away.
Unite us together again in one family,
to sing Your praise forever and ever. Amen.

1) Proclamation

We firmly hope in the resurrection of the dead, and we pray for all who have died that they may experience the mercy of God. We also ask for their prayers for all our needs, especially that we may grow in holiness and draw closer to the Lord.



2) Explanation

For this age group, we recommend that the central teaching be done after a conversation with the students from which the most important points can be elaborated on.

Suggested question prompts:

1) **Q.** Has anyone ever been to a funeral? Why do we celebrate funerals?

A. To remember and honor the dead. To bury or inter our loved ones. To seek the Lord's mercy.

2) **Q.** What are some ways we honor our family members who have passed away?

A. Put up a picture. Remember them at the celebration of All Souls Day, and Día de los Muertos. Attend their funeral. Pray for them.

3) **Q.** When does the Church pray for all of our loved ones who have died?

A. At Mass, during funerals, at cemeteries, and at home or in church, we can pray for our family members who have died. On All Saints Day on November 1st, we ask for the prayers of all those saints who are alive with Jesus in Heaven. On All Souls Day we pray for all those members of our families and all those who have died . . .

4) **Q.** How do we pray for those who have died?

A. We pray for our family members, friends and all who have died at Mass, when we say our prayers at night; we can remember them when we pray or when we miss them . . .

Teaching

- Did you know that one of the most beautiful things that Jesus taught was that those who have faith in Him will have everlasting life and will be with Him in heaven? Our loved ones in heaven are united with us especially during the Mass where heaven worships together with us. We can pray for them and ask for their prayers.

Share a story about a family member or friend that you talk to and pray for/with.

Catechesis (main points to cover)

- Jesus loves us so much He wants us to live with Him and everyone else who is in heaven forever.
- On earth there are many good things but the earth is not our final home. God's love has something prepared for us that is even better. Here on earth there is sin and sickness, but in heaven everything good on earth is brought to perfection.
- When someone dies we have a special way of remembering and honoring them called a funeral, which prepares the person who has died to enter into new and everlasting life with Jesus and helps the family mourn their loss.
- We pray for our family and friends who have died, hoping that they will experience the love and mercy of God, and we ask for their intercession for us.
- We believe that we will be reunited with our family and friends and all those who are in heaven.

3) Application

Guided reflection and discussion

- Prompt: start with a large group discussion.
 - Is there someone who died that you

would want to meet in heaven? A famous person, a family member, a friend? What would you ask them?

Let several students respond, establish a proper sense of excitement and wonder

- Activity sheet “We Pray to the Lord”

Help students fill in the worksheet.

- Which family members do you want to pray for?
- Which friends do you want to pray for?
- Who else do you want to pray for?
- What deceased family and friends do you want to pray for?
- Key points to reinforce.
 - We are asked by God to remember the dead in prayer.
 - We are asked by God to honor the dead by praying for them, honoring their memory, visiting their gravesite, etc.
 - In heaven we are one big family, and our relationship doesn't end when someone dies. We are united through Christ and His Church.
 - We pray for the dead and ask for their prayers.
 - One day we hope to join them in heaven.
 - Those who have died who are preparing for heaven in purgatory are helped by our prayers.



4) Celebration

Finish the lesson by reinforcing any key points and offering a concluding prayer inviting children to pray for any family members and friends who have died.



“I am the good shepherd, and I know mine and mine know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I will lay down my life for the sheep.

My sheep hear my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish. No one can take them out of my hand” — *John 10:14-15, 27-28*

We pray to the Lord.

Make a list of all the people you want to pray for.

Family: _____

Friends: _____

Other people: _____

Deceased family and friends: _____



Third Grade – Preparation

Christian Burial

Please read before the lesson to prepare

Most students will have been to a funeral or seen one on TV. They probably know that there is a special way that we say good bye to the dead. Since the early days of the Church, Catholics have understood burying/interring the dead as a corporal work of mercy and celebrated a distinct liturgy for the deceased. The funeral liturgy takes place in three parts: The Vigil—as family gathers to console one another and honor the memory of the deceased; the Funeral Mass—the sacred liturgy that commends the deceased to the mercy of God; and the Rite of Committal—the final act of the community in bringing the deceased to their place of burial.

This session is meant to teach students the central aspects of the Catholic burial rite and how it both honors the deceased and offers consolation to the family.

Below are some Bible and Catechism quotes that will help you to prepare for this lesson.

Bible Quotations

“Or are you unaware that we who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were indeed buried with him through baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might live in newness of life.” – *Romans 6:3-4*

“but now made manifest through the appearance of our savior Christ Jesus, who destroyed death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.” – *2 Tim 1:10*

“For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him might not perish but might have eternal life.” – *John 3:16*

“Jesus wept.” – *John 11:35*



Catechism Quotations

CCC 1685 – “The different funeral rites express the Paschal character of Christian death and are in keeping with the situations and traditions of each region, even as to the color of the liturgical vestments worn.”

CCC 1686 – “*The Order of Christian Funerals* of the Roman liturgy gives three types of funeral celebrations, corresponding to the three places in which they are conducted (the home, the church, and the cemetery), and according to the importance attached to them by the family, local customs, the culture, and popular piety. This order of celebration is common to all the liturgical traditions and comprises four principal elements. [The Greeting of the Community, the Liturgy of the Word, the Eucharistic Sacrifice, and the Farewell].”



CCC 1689 – “*The Eucharistic Sacrifice.* When the celebration takes place in church the Eucharist is the heart of the Paschal reality of Christian death.¹⁹⁰ In the Eucharist, the Church expresses her efficacious communion with the departed: offering to the Father in the Holy Spirit the sacrifice of the death and resurrection of Christ, she asks to purify his child of his sins and their consequences, and to admit him to the Paschal fullness of the table of the Kingdom. It is by the Eucharist thus celebrated that the community of the faithful, especially the family of the deceased, learn to live in communion with the one who ‘has fallen asleep in the Lord,’ by communicating in the Body of Christ of which he is a living member and, then, by praying for him and with him.”

CCC 1690 – “*A farewell* to the deceased is his final ‘commendation to God’ by the Church. It is “the last farewell by which the Christian community greets one of its members before his body is brought to its tomb.”¹⁹² The Byzantine tradition expresses this by the kiss of farewell to the deceased:

By this final greeting “we sing for his departure from this life and separation from us, but also because there is a communion and a reunion. For even dead, we are not at all separated from one another, because we all run the same course and we will find one another again in the same place. We shall never be separated, for we live for Christ, and now we are united with Christ as we go toward Him . . . we shall all be together in Christ.”



The Three Sacred Moments of a Catholic Funeral



The Vigil. The rite celebrated by the Christian community in the time following death and before the funeral liturgy. It is a time when loved ones show their respect and greet the family and friends of the deceased. It is also the most ideal time to share their memories of the deceased through a eulogy or video tribute, usually held at the funeral home the day before the Funeral Mass.



Funeral Mass. This is the central liturgical celebration held with the deceased's body present at a church. Part of Catholic belief is that those who follow the way of Jesus shall forever be in Heaven, body and soul, in the presence of God. We believe in the bodily resurrection. Also, the Church honors the body because it has been the temple of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, the Church says that the body should be present at the funeral rites. If cremation is selected, the Church prefers that the body be present at the Mass.



Rite of Committal. This rite is the final act of our faith community in caring for the body of its deceased member. By our presence at this rite, we help the mourners face the end of one relationship with the deceased and the beginning of a new one based on prayerful remembrance, gratitude and the hope of resurrection and reunion. The celebration, whenever possible, takes place not in a cemetery chapel but at the open grave or place of interment. The act of committal expresses that the grave, once a sign of despair, is now, through Christ's own death and resurrection, a sign of hope and promise. The Church encourages all Catholics to seek out a Catholic Cemetery that has been blessed and consecrated as a final resting place.



Opening Prayer

The prayer that is said at the graveside, modify to suit your use as needed.

Lord Jesus Christ,
by Your own three days in the tomb,
You hallowed the graves of all who
believe in You
and so made the grave a sign of hope
that promises resurrection
even as it claims our mortal bodies.

Grant that our brother and sisters may sleep
here in peace
until You awaken them to glory,
for You are the resurrection and the life.
Then they will see You face to face
and in Your light will see light
and know the splendor of God,
for You live and reign forever and ever. Amen.

1) Proclamation

We are created for communion with God and with one another. God made us to know, love and serve Him. When our life on earth ends, there is a special celebration called a funeral where the deceased are remembered, commended to the mercy of God and buried or interred in a special place called a cemetery.



2) Explanation

Typically this age group will have been introduced to the central tenets of our faith as they prepare for Confirmation and 1st Eucharist. For this reason, a more detailed Catechesis on death, resurrection, and the funeral rite are appropriate.

Suggested question prompts:

- 1) Q. Who knows what the word *resurrection* means?
A. The word resurrection means that after we die, we will rise up again. We will come back to life . . .
- 2) Q. Who knows where we go when we die?
A. God loves us so much He wants us to be with Him and sent His only begotten Son Jesus to save us from sin and death, so that we might live with Him in heaven . . .
- 3) Q. Who knows what we call the special celebration we have when somebody dies?
A. A funeral. A funeral is a special time when we commend the person who has died to the mercy of God and, as Christians, pray for them that through their faith in Jesus Christ they will share in His resurrection.

4) Q. What happens at a funeral?

A. The family gathers to remember the person who died. First, there is usually a Vigil the night before the funeral to remember the deceased and share stories. Often a rosary is said, and friends and family gather to console each other. Second, there is the Funeral Mass, where the Church offers up the prayers for the deceased, and is joined by all the saints and the community of the faithful. Third, there is a committal rite, where the body or the cremated remains are buried or interred.

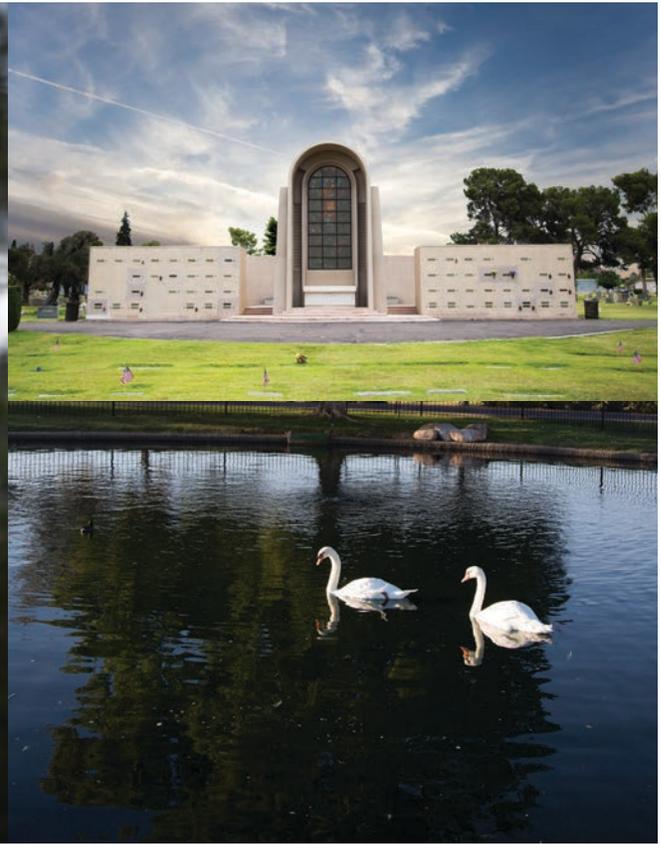
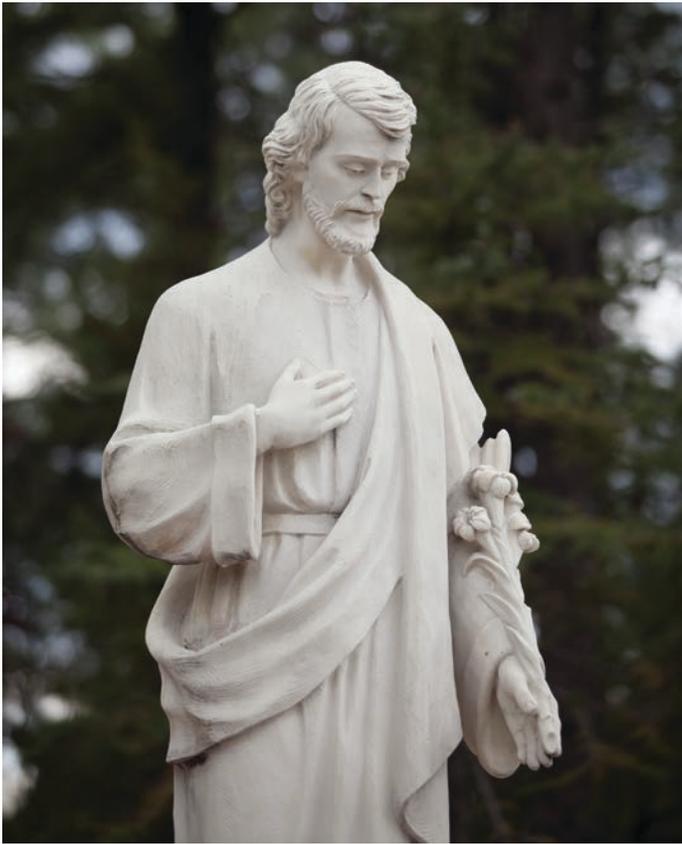
Note: Depending on their experience answers may differ widely

5) Q. How do we relate to our friends and family who have died?

A. As followers of Christ, we know that death does not separate us. Even though we no longer see the person who has died walking on this earth, they are still alive with Jesus and the saints, we can still talk to them like we talk to God when we pray. They hear us and can help us.

6) Q. When does the Church pray for all of our loved ones who have died?

A. At Mass, during funerals, at cemeteries, and at home or in church, we can pray for our family members and all who have died. On All Saints Day on November 1st, we ask for the prayers of all those saints who are alive with Jesus in Heaven. On All Souls Day we pray for all those who have died, especially our family and friends . . .



Teaching

Witness:

- If appropriate, share a story of a funeral you attended, share what happened focusing on the two most important aspects,
 - 1) The dead was commended to the mercy of God.
 - 2) The grieving were consoled and given an opportunity to mourn the loss of their loved one.

Catechesis (main points to cover):

- Jesus loves us so much He wants us to know the joy of living His way of holiness. He wants us all to one day be with Him in the joy and happiness of heaven.
- When someone dies, we have a special way of remembering and honoring them called a funeral which prepares the person who has died to enter into new and everlasting life with Jesus and helps the family mourn their loss.
- Usually the funeral has three distinct parts.
 - 1) The Vigil
 - 2) The Funeral Liturgy
 - 3) The Rite of Committal
- We pray for our family and friends who have died hoping that they will experience the love and mercy of God, and we ask for their prayers

and intercession to help us grow in holiness and to love God with all our hearts.

- We believe that we will be reunited with our family and friends and all those who are in heaven.

3) Application

Guided reflection and discussion

- Activity Sheet “The Christian Funeral”
 - Help students fill in the worksheet.
- Key points to reinforce.
 - The funeral entrusts the person who has died to the mercy of God.
 - The funeral provides consolation and healing for those who mourn.
 - The funeral includes the Vigil, Funeral Mass and Rite of Committal (burial).
 - It has been the tradition of the Church to pray for and bury or inter the dead through the funeral liturgy.
 - The proper place to celebrate the Funeral Mass is in the Church.
- Recommended Video Resource: Fr. Mike Schmidt “The Real Purpose of Funerals”
ascensionpresents.com/video/the-real-purpose-of-funerals





4) Celebration

Finish the lesson by reinforcing any key points and offering a concluding prayer/meditation inviting children to pray for any family members and friends who have died.

Suggested meditation: Have the children close their eyes . . . close your eyes and picture your family members and any friends who have died rejoicing with great joy in heaven with Jesus and all the saints, laughing, talking, sharing stories, praying. Imagine those family members who you may have known, and those who died long ago. How many of you can picture them all rejoicing in heaven? Who are remembering? Can you picture them in your mind? Now think about this. . . their rejoicing will never have to come to an end, they will never have any bad news to make them sad, they won't have to stop their heavenly joy for chores to do. Everything that they do will be filled with joy and they will be made

perfect in the kingdom of heaven. Their joy will last forever, no one will ever die again!

Now open your eyes. What did you see? (Let them share) Who was there? Isn't heaven wonderful. This is what we were made for. God wants us to be with Him in heaven, which is why we want to know and live for Him on earth, and why we pray for our family and friends who have died, that they would experience this joy.

Let's pray and ask everyone in heaven to help us. I will say the prayer out loud and you can pray silently in your hearts.

Dear God, thank you for preparing such a beautiful place for us. We are so excited for the celebration we will have when we get to heaven. We ask all the angels and saints to help us whenever we need it and most of all to help us get to heaven one day, so that we might rejoice with our family and friends who are there praying for and interceding for us.





The Christian Funeral

Jesus said “In my Father’s house there are many dwelling places . . . I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back again and take you to Myself, so that where I am you also may be” – *John 14:2,3*

Directions

Match the descriptions with the part of the funeral that best fits.
Add to description of what happens during each part of the funeral.

Parts of the Funeral

1) The Vigil



2) The Funeral Mass



3) The Committal Rite



Descriptions

- A) The Church offers their prayers for the dead and celebrates the Mass.

- B) The family gathers before the Funeral Mass to share memories, say goodbye to their loved one, and offer prayers.

- C) The family goes to the cemetery for the burial or interment of their deceased loved one.

Fourth Grade through Sixth Grade – Preparation

Corporal Works of Mercy: Burying the Dead

Please read before the lesson to prepare

Most students will have attended a funeral or known someone who has passed away. Burying/interring the dead is one of the corporal works of mercy, and is a central part of the faith community. Alongside the many charitable activities of feeding and sheltering the poor, visiting the sick and imprisoned, our parishes also celebrate thousands of funerals for the deceased. This session is meant to teach students how families and the Christian community participate in the corporal works of mercy when they bury/inter the dead. Below are some Bible and Catechism quotes that will help you to prepare for this lesson.

Bible Quotations

“By the sweat of your brow you shall eat bread, until you return to the ground, from which you were taken; For you are dust, and to dust you shall return.” – *Gen 3:19*

“My son, shed tears for one who is dead, with wailing and bitter lament; As is only proper, prepare the body, and do not absent yourself from the burial.” – *Sirach 38:16*

“Or are you unaware that we who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? We were indeed buried with Him through baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might live in newness of life.” – *Romans 6:3-4*

“We do not want you to be unaware, brothers, about those who have fallen asleep, so that you may not grieve like the rest, who have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose, so too will God, through Jesus, bring with him those who have fallen asleep.” – *1 Thess 4:13-14*



Catechism Quotations

CCC 1690 – “A farewell to the deceased is his final commendation to God by the Church. It is the last farewell by which the Christian community greets one of its members before his body is brought to its tomb. 192 The Byzantine tradition expresses this by the kiss of farewell to the deceased:

By this final greeting we sing for his departure from this life and separation from us, but also because there is a communion and a reunion. For even dead, we are not at all separated from one another, because we all run the same course and we will find one another again in the same place. We shall never be separated, for we live for Christ, and now we are united with Christ as we go toward him . . . we shall all be together in Christ.” 193

CCC 2300 – “The bodies of the dead must be treated with respect and charity, in faith and hope of the Resurrection. The burial of the dead is a corporal work of mercy; 92 it honors the children of God, who are temples of the Holy Spirit.”

The Three Sacred Moments of a Catholic Funeral



The Vigil. The rite celebrated by the Christian community in the time following death and before the funeral liturgy. It is a time when loved ones show their respect and greet the family and friends of the deceased. It is also the most ideal time to share their memories of the deceased through a eulogy or video tribute, usually held at the funeral home the day before the Funeral Mass.



Funeral Mass. This is the central liturgical celebration held with the deceased's body present at a church. Part of Catholic belief is that those who follow the way of Jesus shall forever be in Heaven, body and soul, in the presence of God. We believe in the bodily resurrection. Also, the Church honors the body because it has been the temple of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, the Church says that the body should be present at the funeral rites. If cremation is selected, the Church prefers that the body be present at the Mass.



Rite of Committal. This rite is the final act of our faith community in caring for the body of its deceased member. By our presence at this rite, we help the mourners face the end of one relationship with the deceased and the beginning of a new one based on prayerful remembrance, gratitude and the hope of resurrection and reunion. The celebration, whenever possible, takes place not in a cemetery chapel but at the open grave or place of interment. The act of committal expresses that the grave, once a sign of despair, is now, through Christ's own death and Resurrection, a sign of hope and promise. The Church encourages all Catholics to seek out a Catholic Cemetery that has been blessed and consecrated as a final resting place.



Opening Prayer

(The prayer said at the graveside, modify to suit your use as needed)

Lord Jesus Christ,	Grant that our brothers and sisters may sleep
by Your own three days in the tomb,	here in peace
You hallowed the graves of all who believe	until You awaken them to glory,
in You	for You are the resurrection and the life.
and so made the grave a sign of hope	Then they will see You face to face
that promises resurrection	and in Your light will see light
even as it claims our mortal bodies.	and know the splendor of God,
	for You live and reign forever and ever. Amen.

1) Proclamation

(From the Order of Christian Funerals) At the death of a Christian, whose life of faith was begun in the waters of baptism and strengthened at the eucharistic table, the Church intercedes on behalf of the deceased because of its confident belief that death is not the end nor does it break the bonds forged in life. The Church also ministers to the sorrowing and consoles them in the funeral rites with the comforting word of God and the sacrament of the eucharist.



2) Explanation

Typically this age group will have been introduced to the central tenets of our faith and have received or are preparing for Confirmation and First Eucharist, for this reason a more detailed Catechesis on the corporal works of mercy and the funeral rite are appropriate.

Suggested question prompts:

- | | |
|--|---|
| 1) Q. What are some of the things that Jesus asked us to do?
A. He asked us to believe in Him, to live a good and virtuous life, to trust Him, and He also asked us to love Him and one another. He asked us to serve the poor, visit the ill and imprisoned and also to bury the dead. | 2) Q. Does anyone know the corporal works of mercy?
A. They are feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, shelter the homeless, clothe the naked, visit the sick and imprisoned, bury the dead, and give alms to the poor. |
|--|---|

3) Q. How do we honor and bury the dead?

A. That's right. A funeral. A funeral is a special time when we commend the person who has died to the mercy of God and, as Christians, pray for them that through their faith in Jesus Christ they will share in His resurrection.

4) Q. What happens at a funeral?

A. The family gathers to remember the person who died. First, there is a Vigil (also called a wake) the night before the funeral to remember the deceased and share stories. Often a rosary is said, and friends and family gather to console each other. Second, there is the Funeral Mass, where the Church offers up the prayers for the deceased, and is joined by all the saints and the community

of the faithful. Third, there is a committal rite, where the body or the cremated remains are buried or interred.

Note: Depending on their experience answers may differ widely

5) Q. When does the Church pray for all of our loved ones who have died?

A. At Mass, during funerals, at cemeteries, and at home or in church, we can pray for our family members and all who have died. On All Saints Day on November 1st, we ask for the prayers of all those saints who are alive with Jesus in Heaven. On All Souls Day we pray for all those who have died, especially our family and friends . . .



Teaching

Witness:

- If appropriate, share a story of a funeral you attended, share what happened focusing on the two most important aspects,
- 1) The dead was commended to the mercy of God.
- 2) The grieving were consoled and given an opportunity to mourn the loss of their loved one.

Catechesis (main points to cover):

- The corporal works of mercy are important ways that we honor the dignity of each person created in God's image. Alongside serving the poor, burying or interring of the dead is a very important aspect of our Catholic faith.
- When someone dies, we have a special way of remembering and honoring them called a funeral which prepares the person who has died to enter into new and everlasting life with Jesus and helps the family mourn their loss.

- Cemeteries are permanent resting places for the bodies of the dead. They can be buried in the ground, interred in a mausoleum (an above ground tomb), or their cremated remains can be put in a columbarium (a small niche). It's customary that families visit the burial place of their dead loved ones on special anniversaries and All Souls Day or Día de los Muertos.
- Usually the funeral has three distinct parts.
 - 1) The Vigil
 - 2) The funeral liturgy
 - 3) The Rite of Committal

We pray for our family and friends who have died with firm hope that they will experience the love and mercy of God, and we ask for their prayers and intercession to help us grow in holiness and to love God with all our hearts. We believe that we will be reunited with our family and friends and all those who are in heaven.

3) Application

Guided reflection and discussion

Activity sheet “The Christian Funeral”

- Help students fill in the worksheet.

Key points to reinforce.

- Honoring and burying or interring the dead is a duty of every Catholic.
- The funeral commends the dead to the mercy of God.
- The funeral provides consolation and healing for those who mourn.
- The funeral includes the Vigil, Funeral Mass and Rite of Committal.

- Visiting the gravesite of family members who have passed away is a longstanding custom in the Church.

Recommended video resource: Fr. Mike Schmidt “The Real Purpose of Funerals”
ascensionpresents.com/video/the-real-purpose-of-funerals

4) Celebration

Finish the lesson by reinforcing any key points and offering a concluding prayer inviting children to pray for any family members and friends who have died

Another option is to pray the Stations of the Cross on the next page.





The Stations of the Cross

Proclamation

Jesus came to die for us so that we could live forever! Jesus conquered death by dying! This is how much God loves us!

Instructions

Meditate on the Stations of the Cross (either all 14 or select a few). This can be done either by going to church and using the stations there or by using pictures or PowerPoint slides in class.

Keep it simple by using brief meditations for each station (use those provided here or any other age-appropriate ones you like).

End each station-meditation with: “We adore you O Christ and we praise you.”

(Children respond): “Because by your Holy Cross you have redeemed the world.”

1. Jesus is condemned to death.

Witnesses lied to get Jesus condemned to death. Jesus was innocent. He could have proved it. Instead, He freely accepted to die like a criminal so that we could be saved.

2. Jesus accepts His cross.

The Romans made condemned criminals carry their own cross. Jesus accepted the heavy cross. He knew that the cross was the way He would redeem the whole world.

3. Jesus falls the first time.

Jesus was very weak because the soldiers had scourged (whipped) Him. He had already lost a lot of blood. He could hardly carry the cross. He fell many times.

4. Jesus meets His mother.

Jesus' mother Mary did not run away and hide when Jesus was in trouble. She stayed right there with Him through it all. As He was carrying His cross through the streets, He stopped to look at His mother. Their hearts were so very sorrowful. Even so, they accepted that this was the way we would all be saved.

5. Simon of Cyrene helps Jesus.

Jesus was so weak that the Roman soldiers were afraid He would die on the way, before they crucified Him. So they made a man named Simon help Jesus carry the cross.

6. Veronica wipes Jesus' face.

Veronica was a very brave woman. Even though it was dangerous because of the Roman soldiers, she went right up to Jesus and wiped His face with her own veil. This comforted Jesus very much because He knew someone cared.

7. Jesus falls a second time.

Jesus fell many times. Even so, He always got back up again and continued to carry His cross. He was determined to die so that our sins could be forgiven.

8. Jesus meets the women of Jerusalem.

Some women came to be with Jesus. They knew He was innocent. They wept for Him when they saw His suffering.

9. Jesus falls a third time.

Jesus was almost at the end of His strength. Even so, He got up again. He wanted to show us how to never give up. He wanted to complete His mission.

10. Jesus is stripped of his clothes.

They took Jesus' clothes off before they nailed Him to the cross. Jesus knows what it's like to feel ashamed. He bore it because He wanted to redeem us. Jesus would go through anything to save us.

11. Jesus is crucified.

They drove nails into Jesus' hands and feet, nailing Him to the cross. The pain He felt was so great. But the love in His heart for us was greater. Jesus accepted death so that we might live.

12. Jesus dies on the cross.

Before Jesus drew His last breath, He gave us His last words. It was painful for Him to speak while nailed to a cross. In one of Jesus' last words, He forgave those who had crucified Him. Jesus is willing to forgive any sin, no matter how terrible.

13. Jesus body is taken down from the cross.

After Jesus had died, they took His body down and laid it in His mother's arms. Mary wept for all that Jesus, her Son, had suffered. Yet she accepted it all and offered His death so that all our sins could be forgiven. Mary is our spiritual mother.

14. Jesus is laid in the tomb.

There was no tomb ready for Jesus. A brave and generous man named Joseph of Arimathea got permission from Pontius Pilate to take the body of Jesus and lay it in His own new tomb. They wrapped Jesus' body in a burial cloth and rolled a heavy stone over the front of the tomb. We know that three days later Jesus would rise from the dead.

Closing Prayer

“Christ became obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Because of this, God greatly exalted Him and bestowed on Him the name which is above every other name.” (Phil 2:8-9) Lord we thank You so much for becoming man to save us. We thank You for suffering and even dying for us so that we could live forever. We know that for a Christian, when we die, “life is changed not ended.” We offer up to You the moment of our death. We ask You to send St. Joseph to help us at that moment. May our Guardian Angel also help us. Take away our fear and give us confidence in the heavenly joys that last forever. Amen.





The Christian Funeral

Jesus said “In my Father’s house there are many dwelling places . . . I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back again and take you to Myself, so that where I am you also may be” – *John 14:2,3*

Directions

Match the descriptions with the part of the funeral that best fits.
Add to description of what happens during each part of the funeral.

Parts of the Funeral

1) The Vigil



Descriptions

A) The Church offers their prayers for the dead and celebrates the Mass.

2) The Funeral Mass



B) The family gathers before the Funeral Mass to share memories, say goodbye to their loved one, and offer prayers.

3) The Committal Rite



C) The family goes to the cemetery for the burial or interment of their deceased loved one.

Catholic Funerals

Please read before the lesson to prepare

Nearly all adults will have attended a funeral or known someone who has passed away. It is likely they have experienced multiple types of funerals and may not immediately understand the traditions of the Catholic funeral.

Below are some Bible and Catechism quotes that will help you to prepare for this lesson.

Bible Quotations

“By the sweat of your brow you shall eat bread, until you return to the ground, from which you were taken; For you are dust, and to dust you shall return.” – *Gen 3:19*

“But now made manifest through the appearance of our savior Christ Jesus, who destroyed death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.” – *2 Tim 1:10*

“For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in Him might not perish but might have eternal life.” – *John 3:16*

“Or are you unaware that we who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? We were indeed buried with Him through baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might live in newness of life.” – *Romans 6:3-4*



Catechism Quotations

CCC 1032 – “From the beginning the Church has honored the memory of the dead and offered prayers in suffrage for them, above all the Eucharistic sacrifice, so that, thus purified, they may attain the beatific vision of God. The Church also commends almsgiving, indulgences, and works of penance undertaken on behalf of the dead:

Let us help and commemorate them. If Job’s sons were purified by their father’s sacrifice, why would we doubt that our offerings for the dead bring them some consolation? Let us not hesitate to help those who have died and to offer our prayers for them.”

CCC 1055 – “By virtue of the ‘communion of saints,’ the Church commends the dead to God’s mercy and offers her prayers, especially the holy sacrifice of the Eucharist, on their behalf.”

CCC 1685 – “The different funeral rites express the Paschal character of Christian death and are in keeping with the situations and traditions of each region, even as to the color of the liturgical vestments worn.”

CCC 1686 – “The Order of Christian Funerals of the Roman liturgy gives three types of funeral celebrations, corresponding to the three places in which they are conducted (the home, the church, and the cemetery), and according to the importance attached to them by the family, local customs, the culture, and popular piety. This order of celebration is common to all the liturgical traditions and comprises four principal elements. [The Greeting of the Community, the Liturgy of the Word, the Eucharistic Sacrifice, and the Farewell]”

CCC 1689 – “The Eucharistic Sacrifice. When the celebration takes place in church the Eucharist is the heart of the Paschal reality of Christian death. In the Eucharist, the Church expresses her efficacious communion with the departed: offering to the Father in the Holy Spirit the sacrifice of the death and resurrection of Christ, she asks to purify his child of his sins and their consequences, and to admit him to the Paschal fullness of the table of the Kingdom. It is by the Eucharist thus celebrated that the community of the faithful, especially the family of the deceased, learn to live in communion with the one who ‘has fallen asleep in the Lord’ by communicating in the Body of Christ of which he is a living member and, then, by praying for him and with him.”

CCC 1690 – “A farewell to the deceased is his final ‘commendation to God’ by the Church. It is ‘the last farewell by which the Christian community greets one of its members before his body is brought to its tomb.’ The Byzantine tradition expresses this by the kiss of farewell to the deceased:

By this final greeting ‘we sing for his departure from this life and separation from us, but also because there is a communion and a reunion. For even dead, we are not at all separated from one another, because we all run the same course and we will find one another again in the same place. We shall never be separated, for we live for Christ, and now we are united with Christ as we go toward him . . . we shall all be together in Christ.”

The Three Sacred Moments of a Catholic Funeral



The Vigil. The rite celebrated by the Christian community in the time following death and before the funeral liturgy. It is a time when loved ones show their respect and greet the family and friends of the deceased. It is also the most ideal time to share their memories of the deceased through a eulogy or video tribute, usually held at the funeral home the day before the Funeral Mass.



Funeral Mass. This is the central liturgical celebration held with the deceased’s body present at a church. Part of Catholic belief is that those who follow the way of Jesus shall forever be in Heaven, body and soul, in the presence of God. We believe in the bodily resurrection. Also, the Church honors the body because it has been the temple of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, the Church says that the body should be present at the funeral rites. If cremation is selected, the Church prefers that the body be present at the Mass.



Rite of Committal. This rite is the final act of our faith community in caring for the body of its deceased member. By our presence at this rite, we help the mourners face the end of one relationship with the deceased and the beginning of a new one based on prayerful remembrance, gratitude and the hope of resurrection and reunion. The celebration, whenever possible, takes place not in a cemetery chapel but at the open grave or place of interment. The act of committal expresses that the grave, once a sign of despair, is now, through Christ’s own death and Resurrection, a sign of hope and promise. The Church encourages all Catholics to seek out a Catholic Cemetery that has been blessed and consecrated as a final resting place.

Opening Prayer

The prayer said at the graveside, modify to suit your use as needed

Lord Jesus Christ,
by Your own three days in the tomb,
You hallowed the graves of all who believe
in You
and so made the grave a sign of hope
that promises resurrection
even as it claims our mortal bodies.

Grant that our brothers and sisters may sleep
here in peace
until You awaken them to glory,
for You are the resurrection and the life.
Then they will see You face to face
and in Your light will see light
and know the splendor of God,
for You live and reign forever and ever. Amen.

1) Proclamation

(From the Order of Christian Funerals) At the death of a Christian, whose life of faith was begun in the waters of baptism and strengthened at the eucharistic table, the Church intercedes on behalf of the deceased because of its confident belief that death is not the end nor does it break the bonds forged in life. The Church also ministers to the sorrowing and consoles them in the funeral rites with the comforting word of God and the sacrament of the eucharist.



2) Explanation

Teaching

Witness

- If appropriate, share a story of a funeral you attended, share what happened focusing on the two most important aspects,
 - 1) The dead was commended to the mercy of God.
 - 2) The grieving were consoled and given an opportunity to mourn the loss of their loved one.

Catechesis (main points to cover)

- Jesus loves us so much that He died to free us from sin and death. He wants us to live with Him and all the angels and saints forever in heaven.
- When someone dies, we have a special way of remembering and honoring them called a funeral which prepares the person who has died to enter into new and everlasting life with Jesus and helps the family mourn their loss.

- Cemeteries are permanent resting places for the bodies of the dead. They can be buried in the ground, interred in a mausoleum (an above ground tomb), or their cremated remains can be put in a columbarium (a small niche). It's customary that families visit the burial place of their dead loved ones on special anniversaries and All Souls Day or Día de los Muertos.
- Usually the funeral has three distinct parts.
 - 1) The Vigil
 - 2) The funeral liturgy
 - 3) The Rite of Committal
- We pray for our family and friends who have died hoping that they will experience the love and mercy of God, and we ask for their prayers and intercession to help us grow in holiness and to love God with all our hearts.
- We believe that we will be reunited with our family and friends and all those who are in heaven.

3) Application

Guided reflection and discussion

- What are some of the common ways people approach funerals today? (Attempt to show the challenges that we as a society have with funerals and treating the death of family member with respect)
 - Does it respect the dignity of the person?
 - Does it honor their baptism and desire to be in heaven?

- Does it provide the family with the opportunity to mourn properly?
- Why does the Church provide for three moments of the funeral rite?
- How is the funeral rite a fulfillment or completion of baptism?
- Key points to reinforce.
 - Honoring and burying or interring the dead is a duty of every Catholic.
 - The funeral commends the dead to the mercy of God.
 - The funeral provides consolation and healing for those who mourn.
 - The funeral includes the Vigil, Funeral Mass, and Committal (Burial).
 - Visiting the gravesite of family members who have passed away is a longstanding custom in the Church.
 - Recommended Video Resource: Fr. Mike Schmidt “The Real Purpose of Funerals” ascensionpresents.com/video/the-real-purpose-of-funerals



4) Celebration

Finish the lesson by reinforcing any key points and offering a concluding prayer inviting adults to pray for any family members who have died.

THE CATHOLIC FUNERAL

But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of deeds done by us in righteousness, but in virtue of his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal in the Holy Spirit, which he poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that we might be justified by his grace and become heirs in hope of eternal life. ~ Titus 3:4-7

WHEN A PARENT, spouse, child, sibling, or other family member, or a friend, neighbor, or colleague dies, we respond with grief or sorrow, and sometimes even with anger at their “leaving us.” The separation may involve acute loneliness, a sense of lost opportunities, a broken family circle, and a feeling of sadness that touches every part of life.

For the person who has no hope of life in Heaven, the sorrow can be crushingly bleak. The one who has died is never expected to be seen or heard again, and fond memories can be at best a band-aid on an open wound of the heart. But the Christian whose hope is in the Lord trusts in his promise of immortality. We can hope, with deep assurance, to see God ourselves one day and to meet again those whom we have loved in this life. The Catholic funeral liturgy is the expression of our firm faith in our Lord’s promise that he has prepared a place for us and will take us to himself (see Jn 14:2-3).

For the faithful Christian, death is the only door to eternal life. Although death would not have entered the world if our first parents had not sinned (see Wis 2:24; Rom 5:12), the saving acts of Jesus’ Paschal mystery have conquered death, making it not something to be feared but an event to be welcomed as the passage to eternal life, however difficult and painful that passage might be: *“O death, where is thy victory? O death, where is thy sting?”* (1 Cor 15:55).



DAVID CHARLES PHOTOGRAPHY

“Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his” (Rom 6:3-5). Christians do not see this life as “all there is,” *“[f]or here we have no lasting city, but we seek the city which is to come”* (Heb 13:14), the Heavenly Jerusalem. Living a life

“The Christian whose hope is in the Lord trusts in his promise of immortality.”

of faith and virtue, especially the virtue of charity, and receiving the sacraments worthily

are the preparation for entrance into glory.

In this life, we are as children in the womb of our Mother the Church. Death is birth into eternal life, and the Church accompanies us as we complete the process. At a Catholic funeral, Christ’s Paschal mystery is proclaimed, we are taught to remember the dead, we express our hope of being gathered together as God’s family in his Kingdom, we are encouraged to give witness by our lives to our faith as Christians, and we look for the fulfillment of God’s promises, when *“he will wipe away every tear from [our] eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain any more, for the former things have passed away”* (Rv 21:4).

A Catholic funeral consists of three parts: the Vigil for the Deceased, the funeral Mass, and the Committal. The Vigil for the Deceased can take place at the home

“Death is birth into eternal life.”

of the deceased, a funeral home, or the church itself if well before the funeral Mass. The purpose of the vigil is to turn to God’s Word as our source of faith and hope in a time of loss. At the vigil, we the Christian community “keeps watch” with the family in prayer, and find strength in our communal prayer. We seek God’s mercy for the deceased, and we receive consolation from God’s presence. Most of all, we express our belief in eternal life and in the resurrection of the body. One of the prayers during the vigil reads as follows:

“Lord our God, the death of our brother/sister N. recalls our human condition and the brevity of our lives on earth. But for those who believe in your love death is not the end, nor does it destroy the bonds that you forge in our lives. We share the faith of your Son’s disciples and the hope of the children of God. Bring the light of Christ’s Resurrection to this time of testing and pain as we pray for N. and for those who love him/her, through Christ our Lord” (*Order of Christian Funerals* 72).

The funeral Mass is the most significant celebration of the Christian community for the deceased. The most prominent themes of the liturgy are those of Christ’s Resurrection, when he defeated sin and death, commending the deceased to God’s mercy, and seeking strength for ourselves in Christ’s Paschal mystery. We recall how we share in Christ’s death and Resurrection through our Baptism and look forward to our own resurrection, and we express hope that we will all be united in God’s Kingdom. One of the Opening Prayers reads as follows:

“O God, to whom mercy and forgiveness belong, hear our prayers on behalf of your servant N., whom you have called out of this world; and because he/she put his/her hope and trust in you, command that he/she be carried safely home to Heaven and come to enjoy your eternal reward” (*Order of Christian Funerals* 160).

The selection of readings — one from the Old Testament, a Psalm, a reading from the New Testament other than the Gospel, and the Gospel — should reflect the themes described above, and the hymns and songs should be carefully chosen as well. Neither ornate homilies nor extended eulogies are permissible, for the funeral is not intended to showcase the deceased’s life but to “illumine the mystery of Christian death in the light of the risen Christ” (CCC 1688).



JUPITERIMAGES

At the conclusion of the Mass, there is a final commendation. In the invitation to prayer, the celebrant says: “Before we go our separate ways, let us take leave of our brother/sister. May our farewell express our affection for him/her; may it ease our sadness and strengthen our hope. One day we shall joyfully greet him/her again when the love of Christ, which conquers all things, destroys even death itself” (*Order of Christian Funerals* 171). He then prays over the deceased: “Into your hands, Father of mercies, we commend our brother/sister N. in the sure and certain hope that, together with all who have died in Christ, he/she will rise with him on the last day. Merciful Lord, turn toward us and listen to our prayers: open the gates of paradise to your servant and help us who remain to comfort one another with assurances of faith, until we all meet in Christ and are with you and with our brother/sister for ever. We ask this through Christ our Lord” (*Order of Christian Funerals* 175).

The third part of a Catholic funeral, the Committal, takes place at the cemetery or other location

“The funeral Mass is the most significant celebration of the Christian community for the deceased.”



Resurrection, by James Tissot, 1856-1902

where the body of the deceased is interred. (Options other than interment are permissible in appropriate circumstances, such as burial at sea.) The sure hope of the resurrection of the body is expressed when the celebrant prays: “Because God has chosen to

call our brother/sister N. from this life to himself, we commit his/her body to the earth, for we are dust and unto dust we shall return. But the Lord Jesus Christ will change our mortal bodies to be like his in glory, for he is risen, the firstborn from the dead. So let us commend our brother/sister to the Lord, that the Lord may embrace him/her in peace and raise up his/her body on the last day” (*Order of Christian Funerals* 219). The Church reverences the body even after death, because we as human beings are a body-soul composite and we await the glorification of the body when it is rejoined to the soul after its resurrection. For this reason, the Church prefers interment of the intact body. It permits cremation only when the purpose is not opposed to the teachings of the Church, and in no cases is “scattering of the ashes” permitted, however reverently this might be done.

The grief of the bereaved is also acknowledged at the Committal when the celebrant prays: “Merciful Lord, you know the anguish of the sorrowful, you are attentive to the prayers of the humble. Hear your people who cry out to you in their need, and strengthen their hope in your lasting goodness. We ask this through Christ our Lord” (*Order of Christian Funerals* 223). The Committal concludes with the celebrant praying: “Eternal rest grant unto him/her, O Lord,” to which those gathered respond: “And let perpetual light shine upon him/her.” The priest continues: “May he/she rest in peace,” to which those gathered respond, “Amen.” The priest concludes: “May his/her soul and the souls of all the faithful departed, through the mercy of God, rest in peace,” to which everyone again responds, “Amen” (*Order of Christian Funerals* 223).

(CCC 1680-1690)

The Four Last Things: Death, Judgment, Heaven, and Hell

And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt. ~ Daniel 12:2

BECAUSE OF THE BUSYNESS OF OUR LIVES, and the speed with which the world around us moves, it is somehow possible for us to spend all our time caught up in our everyday joys, sorrows, concerns, and work, without ever thinking about those things which are most important in life. Why are we here? How are we to find true fulfillment in life? What happens after we die? Throughout history Christians have seen great value in remaining focused completely on Christ, and it is impossible to be focused on Christ without pondering these ultimate questions.

The Church has constantly encouraged us to prayerfully ponder the inescapable realities of death, personal judgment, and Heaven and Hell. These things are of *the greatest significance* and have traditionally been called the four last things.

Death: An Event Shrouded in Mystery

“Therefore as sin came into the world through one man and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all men sinned” (Rom 5:12).

One thing that is certain in life is that there will be death. It is inevitable. Yet if our first parents had not sinned, death would not be our lot. God had commanded Adam to avoid only one desirable thing, *“for in the day that you eat of it you shall die” (Gn 2:17)*. Yet Adam and Eve, seduced by the serpent who told them that God had lied to them (see Gn 3:4), ate the forbidden fruit and, as a result, death entered the world: *“you are dust, and to dust you shall return” (Gn 3:19)*.

At some point in time, our lives will end, and

the world as we know it will fall away. But what happens after we die? Do we cease to exist and fall into eternal nothingness or is there something else, something greater and even more vast on the other side of death? Human beings, left to their own reason, cannot find an answer to this question. Death is perhaps the greatest of mysteries. It is the question that is perhaps closest to the human heart, because the truth about death closely concerns us all.

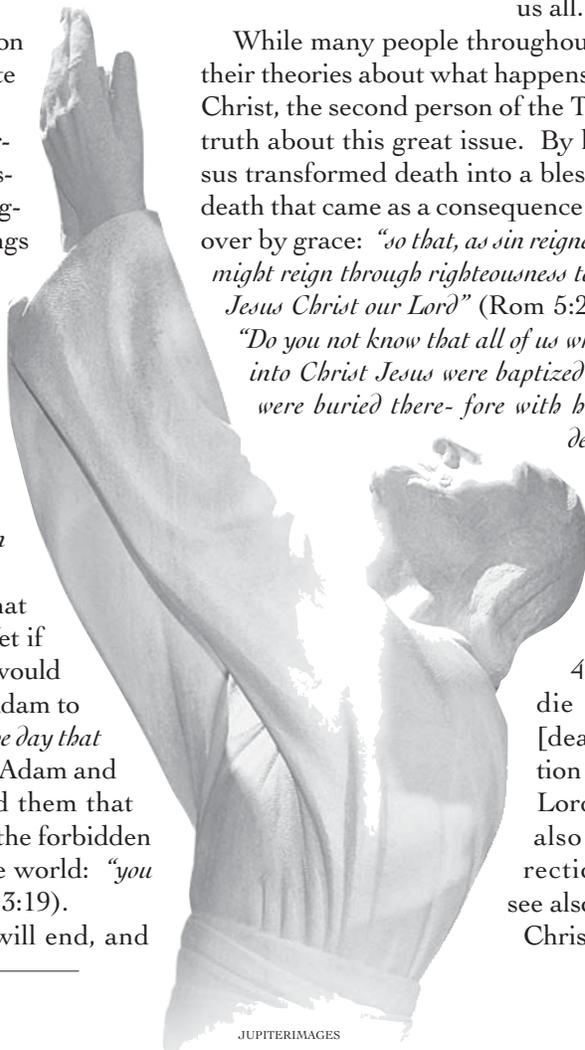
“By his own death, Jesus transformed death into a blessing.”

While many people throughout history have had their theories about what happens after death, Jesus Christ, the second person of the Trinity, revealed the truth about this great issue. By his own death, Jesus transformed death into a blessing. The curse of death that came as a consequence of sin is now taken over by grace: *“so that, as sin reigned in death, grace also might reign through righteousness to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord” (Rom 5:21)*. St. Paul asks, *“Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried there-fore with him by baptism into*

death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father; we too might walk in newness of life” (Rom 6:3-4).

“For those who die in Christ’s grace [death] is a participation in the death of the Lord, so that they can also share his Resurrection”¹ (CCC 1006; see also 1 Cor 15:21).

Christian death, then, is



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¹ Cf. Romans 6:3-9; Philippians 3:10-11



Jesus as Judge, 12th century carved ivory panel

a consoling positive reality; we do not have to die alone. The baptized Christian knows that his or her life belongs to Christ and that death is the physical completion of the “dying with Christ” that began at Baptism. Jesus opens up his own death to allow us to die with him; his obedience and love to God the Father can become our obedience: *“For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life”* (Rom 5:10).

It is in dying and departing from this world that the Christian becomes fully incorporated into the redeeming death of Jesus Christ and reaches out in hope towards the promised final home in Heaven: *“If, because of one man’s trespass, death reigned through that one man, much more will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man Jesus Christ”* (Rom 5:17).

While death will always remain shrouded in mystery, the teaching of Christ gives us firm hope and assurance in preparing for our own death and in coping

with the death of those we love. Many people today stand panicked and helpless in the face of death. It seems such loss and a great uncertainty. It is difficult enough dealing with the loss of one we love, but it is devastating to face death without a deep faith in God and some understanding of the last things. *“When the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written: ‘Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is thy victory? O death, where is thy sting?’”* (1 Cor 15:54-55).

Death: What we Learn from the Funeral Vigil Liturgy

It has been the case since the earliest days of Christianity that in order to know what Christians believe, we should pay attention to their prayers. The Church prays what she believes. What follows are some of the prayers contained in the liturgy of the funeral vigil, the prayer service the night before the funeral. The prayers shed light on the meaning of Christian death.

At the beginning of the liturgy, during the Invitation to Prayer, the celebrant prays, “My brothers and sisters, we believe that all the ties of friendship and affection which knit us as one throughout our lives do not unravel with death” (*Order of Christian Funerals* 71). The bonds of love which unite members of a family or one friend to another remain strong even after a person dies. The celebrant continues, “Confident that God always remembers the good we have done and forgives our sins, let us pray, asking God to gather N. to himself” (*Order of Christian Funerals* 72). This prayer clearly sets forth a proper Christian mindset in the face of death. While it is true that *“the wages of sin is death”*, Jesus by his death conquered death and extends to every person *“the free gift of God [which] is eternal life”* (Rom 6:23). “Lord,” the Church prays, “for your faithful people life is changed, not ended. When the body of our earthly dwelling lies in death we gain an everlasting dwelling place in Heaven”² (CCC 1012). We are pilgrims on earth because our true homeland is in Heaven. The Christian stares into the grave not only confident that the Lord is calling his loved one home but also assured that he will see these very bones resurrected into a glorified body on the last day. Jesus won the victory over death. Without the Resurrection Jesus’ death on the cross would be a sign of failure and defeat to us. But he has arisen and so we glory in the triumph of the cross and look with eyes of faith and

² *Roman Missal*, Preface of Christian Death I

hope past the tomb to the eternal life he promised.

The Church never tires in her work to bring all peoples back into the family of God and so especially at death she commends them to the Father's love and mercy with the following prayer:

Go forth, Christian soul, from this world
in the name of God the almighty Father,
who created you,
in the name of Jesus Christ, the Son of the living God,
who suffered for you,
in the name of the Holy Spirit,
who was poured out upon you...
May you return to [your Creator]
who formed you from the dust of the earth.
May holy Mary, the angels, and all the saints
come to meet you as you go forth
May you see your Redeemer face to face
(CCC 1020).³

The Particular Judgment and The Last Judgment

"When the Son of man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate them one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, and he will place the sheep at his right hand, but the goats at the left. Then the King will say to those at his right hand, 'Come, O blessed of my Father, inherit the Kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food ...' Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when did we see thee hungry and feed thee, or thirsty and give thee drink?...' And the King will answer them, 'Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me.' Then he will say to those at his left hand,

"There is no joy more complete, no love more rapturous, no life more fulfilling."



The Death of St. Joseph, by Jacob Walch, 1440-1516

"Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels; for I was hungry and you gave me no food ..." Then they also will answer, *"Lord, when did we see thee hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not minister to thee?"* Then he will answer them, *"Truly, I say to you, as you did it not to one of the least of these, you did it not to me."* And they will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life" (Mt 25:31-46).

This parable, taken from the New Testament, describes judgment in terms of the final encounter with Christ when he returns at the end of time. "He will come again to judge the living and the dead," we say in the Creed. Such a right the Father gave to him because he suffered death on the cross for our sins. On the last day, Jesus will return as this parable describes and all the dead will be raised, *"those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of judgment"* (Jn 5:29). This event is called the Last Judgment and will mark the end of time and the coming of the Kingdom of God

in its fullness. All those who have died in Christ will be given back their own bodies transformed and glorified, and will enter into the fullness of God's Kingdom in Heaven.

Jesus not only speaks about the Last Judgment but also about the judgment that immediately follows death. He tells a story about the rich man who, when he died, was punished for his lack of charity toward the poor man Lazarus (see Lk 16:19-31). This story illustrates that at death our lives will be laid bare and we will be judged on our love. This immediate judgment the Church has commonly called the *particular judgment* because it is given individually to each person at death. It is not meant to scare us

³ *Order of Christian Funerals, Prayer of Commendation*

but to awaken in us the responsibility we have for our neighbor. And it calls to mind the need for our faith to bear fruit because faith without works is dead (see Jas 2:17).

Heaven: Life in Pure Love

"In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And when I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also" (Jn 14:2-3).

God created us out of his great love so that we might eventually be able to share in his very life. He wants us to share in the deep life of communion that exists between the divine persons of the Trinity. There is no joy more complete, no love more rapturous, no life more fulfilling. Entrance into Heaven will be the experience of entering into the perfect love that exists between the Persons of the Trinity. Trinitarian love is total. It holds nothing back. It is the full giving of self, out of love for the other. If we could imagine our most exhilarating moment of love and joy experienced on this earth, this moment is but a tiny taste of the infinite love and joys of Heaven and the ecstasy that participation in Trinitarian love will bring us. Jesus instituted the Church in order to shower us with sanctifying grace through the sacraments — grace which would make us holy and make us partakers of divine love and Trinitarian life. In God we will find true happiness; he is our final beatitude because our natural desire for happiness will be fulfilled. "Whoever sees God has obtained all the goods of which he can conceive"⁴ (CCC 2548).

While it is true that every human being was created to spend eternity in Heaven, not everyone goes there. Who then goes to Heaven? Only a person who dies in God's grace, free from any mortal sin, is able to go to Heaven. A person must also have been perfectly purified from the effects of sin in order to enter Heaven (see Rv 21:27). This purification can happen here on earth or in Purgatory (see handout on Purgatory). Why must a person be free from mortal sin and also free from the stains of that sin to enter Heaven? Sin is, by its very nature, a rejection of God. If a person dies having rejected God, God will honor his or her free choice. He will not force us to love him — we must freely choose to love him and live in obedience to

"The greatest suffering that the souls in Hell experience is the pain of being eternally separated from God."

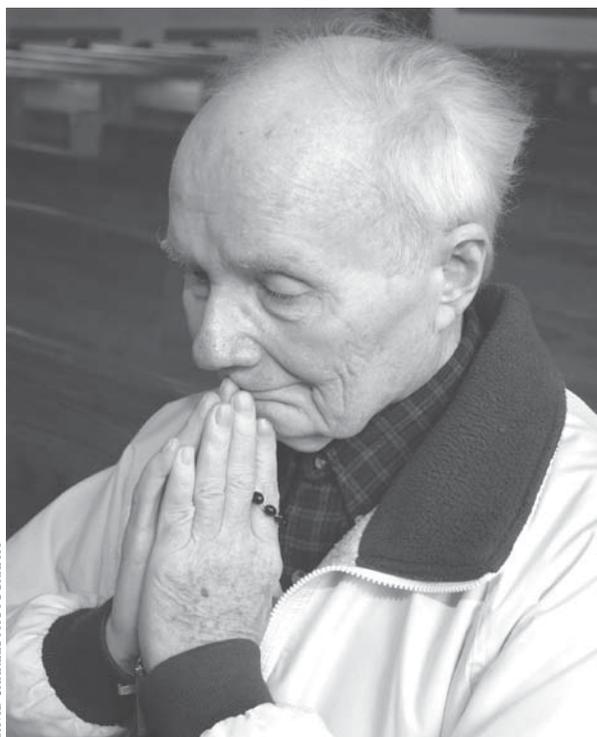
his holy will. The damage left by sin leaves us marred and incomplete; because of sin we are not wholly ourselves.

In order to be united to God in Heaven, we must be entirely ready to greet him, with our whole being, free of all stain or wrinkle. Therefore, the damage caused by sin must be atoned for and made right, and only when a person is perfectly pure of heart will he be able to see God (see Mt 5:8). Every trial, every suffering, every moment of life provides us with the opportunity to be perfected in love. If we make our lives an effort at learning sacrificial, Christ-like love, and if we stay close to the sacraments that give us the power to be truly transformed in love, we will be made perfect. We will enter Heaven and our deepest longings will be satisfied.

Hell: Eternal Separation from the Trinity

"The Son of man will send his angels, and they will gather out of his Kingdom all causes of sin and all evildoers, and throw them into the furnace of fire; there men will weep and gnash their teeth. Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the Kingdom of their Father" (Mt 13:41-43).

God loves us so immeasurably and wants us to spend life everlasting with him in Heaven, but he does



DAVID CHARLES PHOTOGRAPHY

⁴ St. Gregory of Nyssa, De beatitudinibus 6 from J.P. Migne, ed., Patrologia Graeca 44, 1265A (Paris: 1857-1866)



The Peaceful Death of the Just, 19th century lithograph

not force us to love him. He wants us to spend eternity with him — but the choice is ours. We have the chance to turn to Jesus while we are alive, but at the moment of death, our choice is frozen, suspended forever in time (see CCC 1021). We either die in friendship with the Lord or we die out of his grace, in persistent rejection of his love to the end. A person who dies in a state of mortal sin has made a tragic, yet free choice — and will spend eternity separated from God by his or her own choice.

Hell is a place of unimaginable pain and suffering. In the Gospels, Jesus uses a straightforward realism in describing the pain of Hell. He describes it as a place of consuming fire and eternal anguish (see Mt 13:42, 50; Mk 9:43, 48; Rv 21:8). It is the dwelling place of Satan, the fallen angels (called demons), and all those who have rebelled against God.

The greatest suffering that the souls in Hell experience is the pain of being eternally separated from God (see 2 Thes 1:9). The Church has traditionally called this punishment the “pain of loss.” While on earth, it is possible for us to numb our desire for God by acquiring worldly things and focusing on earthly pleasures. When we die, these things can no longer satisfy us. Sin will have lost its appeal and the pleasures we had thought so enticing will be seen in all their emptiness. We will be confronted with the fact that our souls were made for God — and it is God, who through our free choices during life, we have rejected. The person in Hell, through his or

her own choice, will have lost God who is perfect peace, love, and joy — and this loss will cause everlasting torment.

Jesus Christ: Our Just and Merciful Judge

Knowing what we know about the judgment that each of us will face when we die, knowing something about the life of hatred and despair which consumes the souls in Hell, as well as the joys of Trinitarian love in Heaven, we must throw ourselves on the mercy of Jesus. It is Christ who is our Judge — and his judgment is just (see 2 Pt 2:4-7, 9). Every offense against God, every offense against our neighbor will be recalled, and an account must be given: *“Fear God, and keep his commandments; for this is the whole duty of man. For God will bring every deed into judgment, with every secret thing, whether good or evil”* (Eccl 12:13-14). However, if we have sought his mercy and forgiveness, our sins will be cast aside. Our Lord is just, but he is also full of mercy and compassion. He forgives us our sins and offenses, if we repent. If we stray away from him, he waits for us with open arms, calling us gently back into an intimate and loving relationship. He constantly calls. He never ceases offering us his mercy. He wants to spend eternal life with us. If we wait until tomorrow to turn to him and give him our hearts, we may have waited too long. *“Behold, now is the acceptable time; behold now is the day of salvation”* (2 Cor 6:2).

(CCC 678-682, 1005-1014, 1020-1029, 1033-1041, 2548)



Sample Letter to Parents

(Customize as needed)

Dear Parents,

Greetings in the joy of Christ's love. This week in class we discussed death and resurrection. One of the most important truths of the Catholic faith is that death is not the end and that God wants each of us to spend eternity with Him and all the angels and saints in Heaven. For most people, and especially for most children, death is a difficult reality to comprehend. Our faith provides us with a context to understand suffering and death in light of the resurrection. Below are some of the central teachings of our faith regarding death and the beauty of the funeral liturgy. We hope that you will have a discussion with your son or daughter about these important topics.

“*I came that you might have life, and have it to the full*” – *John 10:10*

- Jesus loves us so much that He died to free us from sin and death. He wants us to live with Him and all the angels and saints forever in heaven.
- When someone dies we have a special way of remembering and honoring them called a funeral, which prepares the person who has died to enter into new and everlasting life with Jesus and helps the family mourn their loss.
- Cemeteries are permanent resting places for the bodies of the dead. They can be buried in the ground, interred in a mausoleum (an above ground tomb), or their cremated remains can be put in a columbarium (a small niche). It's customary that families visit the burial place of their dead loved ones on special anniversaries and All Souls Day or Día de los Muertos.
- Usually the funeral has three distinct parts.
 - The Vigil
 - The Funeral Liturgy
 - The Rite of Committal
- We pray for our family and friends who have died hoping that they will experience the love and mercy of God, and we ask for their prayers and intercession to help us grow in holiness and to love God with all our hearts.
- We believe that we will be reunited with our family and friends and all those who are in heaven.



“Do not let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God; believe also in me. My Father’s house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am.”

– John 14:1-3



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