

**QUESTIONS & ANSWERS ON THE LAST RITES, ON RECONCILIATION,
ANOINTING OF THE SICK & VIATICUM, AND ON FUNERALS, THE VIGIL,
WAKE, VISITATION & EULOGIES, AND ON FUNERALS WITHIN MASS &
FUNERALS OUTSIDE MASS, AND ON CREMATION, COMMITTAL & BURIAL,
AND ON PRAYERS & MASSES SAID FOR THE DEAD**

Rev. James L. LeBlanc

Q1: Why should a person seek the sacrament of Anointing of the Sick?

A: Through His sacrament of Anointing of the Sick, Jesus Christ supports the sick in the struggle against illness and continues His messianic work of healing. This sacrament gives the grace of the Holy Spirit to those who are sick. By this grace, the sick person is able not only to bear suffering bravely but also to fight against it. When the priest anoints the sick, he is anointing in the name and with the power of Christ himself. Because the sacrament is an outward sign of inward grace, the sacrament should be celebrated whenever possible with members of the family and other representatives of the Christian community present. As attested to by St. James: "Are there any who are sick among you? Let them send for the priests of the Church, and let the priests pray over them, anointing them with oil in the name of the Lord; and the prayer of faith will save the sick persons, and the Lord will raise them up; and if they have committed any sins, their sins will be forgiven them." (James 5:13-16 and CCC 1510)

Q2: When should a sick or elderly person be anointed and how often?

A: Family members should not wait until a Catholic relative's death is imminent before calling the parish office to arrange for a priest to administer the sacrament of Anointing of the Sick. This sacrament is appropriate for those whose health is seriously impaired by sickness, for those facing surgery or other serious medical tests, as well as for those of an advanced age. The celebration of this sacrament should take place while the sick person is still capable of active participation. Those seeking the sacrament should do so at the beginning of a serious illness. The sacrament of Anointing may be repeated after recovering from an illness, when a person later becomes sick again, and when during the same illness the condition of the sick person becomes more serious. (CCC 1514-1515) To schedule an anointing, contact Mrs. Denise Reardon, our Parish Administrative Assistant, in the parish office @ 448-5930.

Q3: Where can a person be anointed?

A: The sacrament of Anointing of the Sick may be celebrated in the home, in a hospital or nursing home or assisted living institution, or in church.

Q4: What are the principal parts of the sacrament of Anointing of the Sick?

A: The priest prays over the sick person and lays his hands on the sick person. Then the priest anoints the sick person with the blessed oil on forehead and on the palms of the hands while praying for the special graces of the sacrament, "Through this holy anointing may the Lord in his love and mercy help you with the grace of the Holy Spirit. Amen. May the Lord who frees you from sin save you and raise you up. Amen." (CCC 1513)

Q5: What is the relationship of the Sacraments of Reconciliation and Anointing of the Sick?

A: Whenever possible, a sick person should receive the sacrament of Penance prior to the Anointing of the Sick. (Mark 2:1-12 and CCC 1503) The opportunity for Confession and Reconciliation is written right into the ritual of the sacrament of Anointing of the Sick. (CCC 1517) The Christian who unites his own death to that of Jesus views it as a step towards Christ and an entrance into everlasting life. When the priest for the last time speaks Christ's words of absolution of sins over the dying Christian, seals him for the last time with a strengthening anointing, and gives him Christ in viaticum as nourishment for the journey, the Church speaks with gentle assurance, "May you live in peace this day." (CCC 1020)

Q6: What is Viaticum?

A: For those who are about to leave this life, the Church offers the Eucharist as viaticum or food for the journey. Communion in the body and blood of Christ, received at this moment of “passing over” to the Father, has a particular significance and importance as it is the seed of eternal life and the power of resurrection, according to the words of the Lord: “He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day.” (CCC 1524, 1525)

Q7: What is the Christian understanding of death?

A: Christians understand that death is only the end of our earthly life but not the end of our spiritual relationship with God. Because of our belief in the resurrection of the body, we accept death as entry into a new way of living with God. (CC 1681-1683) When a loved one dies, we Christians grieve our loss like everyone else, but we grieve with faith in God and we look to the crucified and risen Jesus for our hope. As St. Paul tells us, “We do not want you to be uninformed, brothers and sisters, about those who have died so that you may not grieve as others who have no hope. For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have died.” (1 Thessalonians 4:13-14). And, so, we commend our dying loved ones, “to almighty God, and entrust you to your Creator. May you return to him who formed you from the dust of the earth. May you see your Redeemer face to face.” (CCC 1020)

Q8: What are the three distinct rites of a complete Catholic Funeral Service?

A: A Catholic funeral is celebrated in three rites: the Vigil service that takes place at the visitation or wake, the Funeral service, either within Mass or outside of Mass, and the Committal service that takes place at the graveside for the burial of the body or the cremated remains of the deceased. The three rites of the funeral correspond to the three places in which they are usually conducted (the home or funeral home, the church, and the cemetery.) (CCC 1686)

Q9: What is the Vigil service?

A: The Vigil service, usually at the visitation or wake held on the evening before the Funeral service, provides an opportunity for friends, family and coworkers to gather, and to share stories of the deceased and words of comfort, and to pray for the deceased. Before the Funeral and Committal services, the Vigil service is the time to read and reflect on the scriptures, to celebrate the life of our loved one and to pray. Survivors should participate in the Vigil as a sign of their concern for the mourners as well as to pray for the deceased. So, the Vigil, and the visitation or wake, are the appropriate times for any eulogies and other words of remembrance of the deceased from family members, friends and coworkers.

Q10: When is the right time and place to give words of remembrance and eulogies of the deceased?

A: The direction that the Catholic Church gives for its Funeral Mass (General Instruction on the Roman Missal 382) is that, “At the Funeral Mass, there should, as a rule, be a short homily, but never a eulogy of any kind.” (CCC 1688) The funeral homily that is directed to be given by the priest is the proper place for his bringing out the saving death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, and how that applies to the deceased, as well as to the survivors, as we are gathered to pray that forgiveness of sins and eternal rest be granted to the deceased. Naturally, we survivors wish to say good things about the person who has died; but in the context of the Mass it is the working of God’s grace in the life of the deceased for which we must give thanks and praise. Thus, it is our parish policy that there will be no eulogies given during a Funeral Mass. The proper place and time to give words of remembrance of and eulogies for the deceased is during the Vigil, at the visitation or wake, or at the reception for the family and friends held after the Funeral.

Q11: Must Catholics have a Funeral Mass?

A: While a Funeral within Mass is preferable, a Funeral outside of Mass is also possible. Mass is not required to be celebrated along with the Funeral service itself. The survivors and the priest should consider the wishes of the deceased as well as those of the persons who will be gathering for the funeral. A Funeral outside of Mass also commends the deceased to God's care while celebrating the mystery of God in life and death. If most of those who will attend the Funeral will have had little experience of the Catholic Mass and will not be qualified to receive the Eucharist at Mass, then a Funeral Service outside of Mass should be considered.

Q12: Who should receive Holy Communion at a Funeral Mass?

A: As Catholics, we fully participate in the celebration of the Mass when we receive Holy Communion, the true Body and Blood of the Lord. Yet, we Catholics should receive Holy Communion only when we are living in communion with the Catholic Church and in the state of sanctifying grace and have made the appropriate fast from food and drink. Because of the connection we draw between being in full communion with the Catholic Church and receiving Holy Communion, we cannot invite those who are not Catholic to share in Holy Communion with us. Still, we welcome all to the celebration of the Mass as our brothers and sisters, and pray that our common baptism and the action of the Holy Spirit will one day draw us closer "...that all may be one." (John 17:22)

Q13: Who may serve as a liturgical minister - priest, deacon, preacher, altar server, lector or extraordinary minister of Holy Communion - at a Catholic Funeral service?

A: Catholics who are in full communion with the Catholic Church and who are qualified and acting as such liturgical ministers in their own Catholic parish churches may serve in such ministries at a Catholic Funeral service.

Q14: Why does the Funeral Mass begin at the church doors?

A: Funeral Masses begin at the doors of the church as our loved one is brought back into the church one last time. Just as the deceased was welcomed into the Church on the day of Baptism, washed free of sin in the font, and clothed in a white garment, so we welcome the deceased back into the church, washed again with baptismal holy water, and clothed in the white baptismal garment that is the funeral pall.

Q15: Why is incense used at a funeral?

A: Incense is used during the funeral as a sign of reverence for the altar of the Lord's sacrifice, His Gospel Good News, His Eucharist, and the body of his member, the deceased, which through baptism became the temple of His Holy Spirit. Incense is also a sign of the community's prayers for the deceased rising to the throne of God.

Q16: Why is the Easter candle lit at a Funeral Mass?

A: The lit Easter candle reminds the faithful that Christ is the Light of the World, and also of His continuing presence among us, of his victory over sin and death, and of our share in that victory by virtue of our Baptismal initiation. The Easter candle recalls the Easter Vigil, that night when the Church blesses new fire and light and awaits in faith the Lord's resurrection. During the Funeral liturgy, the lit Easter candle is placed at the head of the remains of the deceased in line with the altar table, thus visually and symbolically making the connection that already exists theologically between the body of the deceased and the Body of Christ.

Q17: Is cremation allowed in the Catholic practice?

A: Cremation is an acceptable alternative to the burial of the deceased's body. If the deceased is to be cremated this may be accomplished either before or after the Funeral service. In order to have a Funeral

Service the deceased's cremated remains must be brought to the church. If cremation is to occur after the Funeral, the funeral home may provide a temporary casket to have the body present during the wake and the Funeral.

Q18: What should be done with the deceased's cremated remains after the Funeral?

A: Sometimes a person may request that his or her ashes be scattered at a favorite place. The Catholic Church teaches that the cremated remains should not be scattered, but should be put into a grave, tomb or other burial place to which people may return for remembrance and prayer. As Christians, we believe that the cremated remains are not just ashes but rather that they are the sacred remains of a person created in God's own image and who will return to the fullness of life when Christ raises the dead.

Q19: What is the Committal service in the ritual of the Catholic Funeral?

A: The Committal service allows the Christian community to celebrate its final act of loving care for the deceased. At the graveside, the church lovingly turns the deceased's body over to the community of saints. In committing the body to its final resting place in consecrated ground in the cemetery, the community expresses its hope that the remains of the deceased, together with those of the other faithful departed who lie there, will await their bodily resurrection with Christ. "For even dead, we are not 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." (CCC 1690)

Q20: Why should I consider a Catholic cemetery for my deceased loved one?

A: A grave in a Catholic cemetery is a sign of hope in God and in His promise of everlasting life. Such a cemetery is a consecrated burial place for the use of all the members of the Catholic Church. There, the deceased await the resurrection of the dead and the promise of eternal life.

Q21: Why should we pray for the repose of the soul of a deceased person?

A: We offer prayers for the forgiveness of the deceased's not yet forgiven sins (venial, not mortal, Matt 12:31) even after the time of his or her death. In addition, we offer prayers for the remission of the incomplete punishments due to sin even after the forgiveness of those sins. (2 Macc 12:43-46) If we die in God's grace and friendship, free of unrepented mortal, deadly, grave sin, we are given eternal salvation. However, we are not perfectly purified to enter heavenly joy. We must undergo purification to achieve that holiness necessary to stand before God. Every sin, even venial sin, entails an unhealthy attachment to earthly creatures or possessions, which must be purified. The Church gives the name Purgatory to this final purification of the elect, a final cleansing of human imperfection before one is able to enter the joy of heaven. From the very beginning, the Church has honored the memory of the dead and offered prayers in suffrage for them. "Our prayer for them is capable not only of helping them, but also of making their intercession for us effective." (CCC 958, 1032)

Q22: Why do we offer Masses for the intention of the deceased's eternal rest?

A: Masses are prayed for the faithful departed who "have died in Christ but are not yet wholly purified," so that they may be able to enter into the light and peace of Christ. It is a great benefit to the souls on whose behalf the Mass is offered. In the Eucharist, we stand at the foot of the cross with Mary, united with the offering and intercession of Christ. To arrange for Masses to be said by our priests with their intention being the repose of the souls of your loved ones, come visit the parish office. (CCC 1370-1371)

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