

at home, distributing them among people in small “souvenir urns”, or scattering them without actually burying them. These practices do not take full advantage of the spiritual power of the burial, whether because we do not really let go, or because we deprive ourselves of a special sacred place of future visitation. For these reasons none of these practices are part of the Catholic tradition, and **Catholic ministers are not permitted to participate in alternative burial rites** (by blessing the urns or ashes, for example, or by saying prayers at the “scattering”). Of course the wishes of the deceased must be respected, but if any alternative rituals have been proposed it is best to speak with your Catholic minister about them in the planning of the funeral rites.

We sometimes choose these alternative rituals because we just didn't know what the Catholic way was. If you have the ashes of someone at home it is still possible to have them buried no matter how long it has been since your loved one has gone to God. Feel free to contact your parish without fear of embarrassment, and we will be glad to help you arrange this final send-off.

It is our honour and privilege to serve you

The visitation, funeral liturgy, and burial together form a powerful moment that should not be underestimated. These rituals carry in them the collective wisdom of almost 2000 years of experience. Your Catholic ministers have only your best interests at heart, because we have seen over and over again the beautiful and healing graces God gives people by means of these rituals. So feel free to contact us early in the process of planning the funeral rites, to help ensure that you, your family and your friends can take full advantage of the power that God wishes to share with you. May God bless you fully and abundantly!

*“The souls of the just are in the hand of God,
and no torment shall touch them.” (Wisdom 3: 1)*



OUR CATHOLIC FUNERAL RITES

Someone has died...what do we do?

Call 911, and mention that your loved one has died. A doctor will be sent to issue a death certificate, which is necessary before the body of the deceased can be moved.

Call the funeral home. They will receive the body, and begin to prepare it for the funeral rites.

Call your parish. It is our honour and privilege to journey with you in this difficult time. We can meet with you even before you go to the funeral home, so that the arrangements you make will benefit from the full consoling power of our Catholic traditions.

The Quebec government publishes a booklet entitled “What to do in the event of death”. While this booklet does not explain any of the spiritual dimension, it does cover what must be done civilly.

Planning a Catholic funeral

We must not underestimate the power of the Catholic funeral rites. By empowering us to turn our grief over to God they provide us some measure of closure, and help us to turn to the future with hope. We should want to take full advantage of what these rites offer.

Our first priority is to respect the wishes of the deceased, if at all possible. For example, if the person did not want a Catholic funeral, we should respect that. Feel free to talk over the specifics of any special wishes of the deceased with your priest, and he can let you know what is possible to do in a Catholic context.

We should mention that it is possible for a Protestant or Orthodox to receive a funeral in a Catholic church, provided of course that this would not have been contrary to their wishes.

The Catholic funeral rites have three main “stations”: (1) the visitation, (2) the funeral liturgy, and (3) the burial.

The Visitation

The visitation (usually at the funeral home) is a chance to come together and mutually console one another. It is also a chance to receive love and support from the community. A minister of the Church will typically make a visit as well. Do not hesitate to ask for prayers to be led, and feel free to have friends and family members themselves lead prayers (such as the Rosary, for example).

These rituals and gestures can be tiring but have tremendous consoling power. For these reasons, a visitation should not be too short -- give yourselves time to let God prepare you for the next step.

The funeral liturgy

The funeral liturgy is the moment *par excellence* when we turn our grief over to God and implore his saving power. For Catholics this liturgy is usually a special funeral Mass, held in the parish church. The symbols, the readings and homily, the music, the communion and the gestures of farewell are all powerful reminders that God conquers all things -- even death.

Many Catholics are opting to have a funeral liturgy in the funeral home. This is leading to some confusion. Despite appearances, the “chapel” in a funeral home is not, in fact, a Catholic chapel at all. It was built by a secular business that must report to its shareholders. While we have nothing against earning an honest profit, in this context there is a danger that the Mass can become part of a “product” that is bought and sold.

It is possible to have a Catholic funeral liturgy in a funeral home, but if this is your option you need to know that **Catholic priests are not permitted to say Mass or distribute Holy Communion in the “chapel” of a funeral home.**

If we think about it, though, does it not make more sense that the funeral liturgy take place in the church? After all, the person was baptized in church, had their First Communion and Confirmation in church, and would even have been married in church. Having the funeral liturgy in church recognizes that death is also a sacred event, with God no less present. So do consider bringing your loved one to church one last time. We are ready to welcome you.

The burial

The book of Genesis shows God creating the first human being out of the earth, and only then breathing a soul into him. After a loved one’s soul has gone to God in death, it is now time to return his or her body to the earth from which it was made by burying it in consecrated ground.

This burial usually takes place immediately after the funeral liturgy, but sometimes a temporary delay is needed. Either way your Catholic minister will be ready to lead you in prayer at the grave site.

Some cultures prefer to place the remains of the deceased in a special building or mausoleum dedicated to this purpose. This tradition reminds us of Jesus’ words, “In my Father’s house are many rooms”. (John 14: 2) Along with burial at sea, the use of a mausoleum is possible in the Catholic tradition.

The burial in a consecrated place is a powerful moment. It allows us to let go in a final gesture of farewell. This gives God room to enter our hearts and guide us to a future with hope. It also gives us a designated special place to visit on special days and anniversaries, to continue to pray for our loved one as well as for ourselves.

What about cremation?

Cremation is now a possible option within the Catholic funeral rites. It is important we understand how it fits in a Catholic context.

Our recommendation is, if cremation is to be used, that it be done after the funeral liturgy. Our Catholic traditions hold the body of the deceased in high esteem, because during the person’s life that body was a temple of the Holy Spirit. There are certain prayers and gestures in the funeral liturgy, such as sprinkling with Holy Water and the use of incense, which are meant to show honour to this body. These can only be used, however, if that body is actually present. So while it is possible to have a true funeral liturgy in the presence of ashes (and sometimes this is unavoidable), if we wish to truly take full advantage of the power of our Catholic traditions it is best to bring the body to church and have the cremation afterwards.

It is important to note that the ashes should be buried, in their entirety, and all in the same place. Some new and different practices are emerging, such as keeping some or all of the person’s remains behind

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