

GRIEVING, LOSS AND THE CATHOLIC FUNERAL

On behalf of the entire community of the Minor Basilica, I am truly sorry for your present grief. Whether you are suffering a loss or anticipating one, the Church grieves with you.

This resource is designed to help you, as one in grieving, to understand and anticipate the ceremonies of the Catholic Funeral and to make the necessary arrangements with a minimum of difficulty and distraction. This isn't an exhaustive doctrinal guide, only a simple statement of our beliefs and their application to your situation. Of course, this booklet cannot hope to cover every circumstance or exception or family concern, it does, however, provide a faithful and clear resource for you in this difficult time.

We will make every effort to accommodate your family's needs throughout this difficult time.

Once again, know that the Church is with you in your suffering and wants to be a constant companion in this time and, as you need us, down the road.

This page is a thorough guide to understanding death and planning all the necessary events associated with the end of life.

THE CATHOLIC UNDERSTANDING OF SUFFERING

Suffering, by its very nature, is perceived to be bad, even evil. For many good people, avoiding suffering is a major part of life. In fact, suffering entered into the world because of Adam and Eve's Original Sin. But Jesus, by His teaching and by His example, transformed suffering. He embraced it and chose to use suffering as the means for our salvation. In doing that, He gave our suffering meaning and even value. Suffering for the Christian is an opportunity to be near to Christ on the Cross. It is an opportunity to be connected with the Lord in a profoundly real way. Suffering allows the individual to realize the temporary nature of life and the frailty of the body and to place much trust and faith in the hands of the Lord.

These opportunities ought not to be set aside lightly. While it is difficult to watch a loved one suffer, the spiritual power of suffering is seen in the scriptures and in the lives of numberless saints who came to realize that eternal life is far more important than comfort or satisfaction in this life. This is precisely why the Church mandates and

prescribes limited sufferings as a regular part of the Christian life. Abstaining from meat on Fridays and fasting from some specific food during Lent are only two examples of these requirements.

The Church is not so foolish as to expect that these intellectual realizations will make suffering much easier to endure, but they ought to inform our thinking about the way that we face suffering (ours or the suffering of another).

MORAL DECISIONS AT THE END OF LIFE

As medical science advances, the possibility of extending or restoring life and health poses increasingly complex questions. These questions are often made even more difficult by the extreme emotions of suffering and death, the stress of making quick decisions and the uncertainty of diagnoses that can change from moment to moment. While these decisions involve medicine and science, they are primarily moral decisions which must be considered from the perspective of the creator and sustainer of life itself.

A moral decision comes from three judgements: the object of the decision (do I administer this treatment? do I pull the plug?), the circumstances of the decision (is the person brain dead? Does another doctor agree? is the family in agreement?) and the intention of the decision (Why am I making this decision? Do I want to help this person? Am I afraid of losing this person?). Whatever the specific question, each of these judgements has an effect.

While there are some questions easily answered:

- Do I have to keep giving water and nutrition? yes.
- Do I have to put him or her on a ventilator? no.

Most questions will require someone to gather the facts, get a medical opinion (perhaps more than one), consider the feelings of those present and consider the legal obligations and consequences of the decision. Then, after compiling the information, the ultimate decision ought to be made for the right reasons and as a function of right belief. If the decision isn't pressing, a consultation ought to be made with a member of the clergy or a trained ethicist who can assist you. Keep in mind that in many circumstances, there is not a right answer, merely a better one. And the goodness of a decision is a function of the right intention and the best rational decision under the given circumstances.

THE CATHOLIC UNDERSTANDING OF DEATH AND BURIAL

“For the Christian, life is changed, not ended.” -- From the Mass for the Dead I

The Scriptures identify four “last things” associated with the transition from this life to eternal life: death, judgment, Heaven and Hell. Each of these last things are beyond the reach of scientific fact or research, even the scriptures reveal precious few real definitive details. Regardless of the stories of near death experiences or popular spirituality books, only God knows with certainty how each of these last things really works. And so, the Catholic Church understands and teaches about these last things with reference to those scriptures and to the logical, rational conclusions that flow from them.

Death is a great mystery even as it’s a mundane part of life. It is almost universally feared, even to the point that many of the modern professional Funeral services go to great lengths creating the illusion that the deceased is merely resting comfortably in the casket. But everyone who has witnessed the life-breath leave the body knows something spiritual has taken place. It’s more that the ceasing of mechanical or electrical power to the machine of the body - it’s the departure of the essence of what made that person a human being.

Christians believe that death, by definition, is the separation of soul and body and, as Jesus taught, that it is the necessary first step toward the entrance into eternal life. It was not originally part of God’s plan for us. After the Original Sin of Adam and Eve, death entered the world and all of Adam and Eve’s “children” would feel its sting. However, when Christ’s redemption was wrought on the Cross and He rose again, *death lost its sting* and thus Christians need have no fear of death. Still, the freedom from fear does not mean that our hearts won’t need to grieve and mourn the loss of a loved one.

Unlike some modern Christians, Catholics do not believe or teach that everyone or even every Catholic will automatically enter into Heaven. Neither, though, does the Church ever say that anyone has been condemned to Hell. The Church does not know the interior of anyone’s soul and so She does not typically speak about the salvation of particular individuals. (The Church names some few men and women who have led exemplary lives as “saints,” effectively teaching that they are in Heaven, but there is no corresponding declaration that those who worked great evil have eternal condemnation.)

Now, this can be a very sensitive issue with those who feel their grief is lessened by clichés like “so-and-so is in a better place” or “she’s with Jesus now” or “he’s in Heaven now.” While these phrases have become very common, the Church does not hold them to be true. The Church believes that each person “receives his eternal retribution in his immortal soul at the very moment of his death, in a particular judgment that refers his life to Christ: either entrance into the blessedness of heaven—through a purification or immediately - or immediate and everlasting damnation” (Catechism of the Catholic Church 1022). That judgment is outlined in numerous scriptures, particularly the Gospel of Matthew.

If that judgment is immediate, one could ask why pray for the dead? Prayers for the dead and Funeral rites associated with the offering of sacrifices for the dead are found throughout Judaism and were an essential part of Christianity well through the Reformation. It is only in the modern era that this practice has been criticized and rejected. The rejection of prayer for the dead seems to arise from one of two beliefs. First, the doctrine of “universal salvation” teaches that Jesus’ death freed everyone from sin and so everyone goes straight to heaven. The very fact that so much evil remains in the world and the fact that Jesus taught a clear and required moral code of His followers causes us to question and ultimately reject that way of thinking. The other belief is a rejection of the Catholic doctrine of Purgatory.

The doctrine of Purgatory is really quite simple. Jesus teaches that *only the pure in heart shall see God*. That idea runs from the story of Moses being unable to look upon the face of God in the Book of Exodus through to the images of the elders casting their golden crowns upon the flood in the Book of Revelation - without question - heaven is marked by the perfection of purity. At the same time, Jesus teaches that *none is good except for God alone* and St. Paul adds that *all have sinned and fallen short of the Glory of God*. The fallen nature of man is perhaps the most constant theme of the entire scriptures. How does a Christian, then, reconcile these contradictory ideas that all of us are not pure and yet everyone in Heaven is perfectly pure? If human beings have free will and are created in the image and likeness of God, then the Lord would not simply circumvent that gift and transform us into something we have not freely chosen. God does not circumvent free will even to save souls from damnation. As such, there must exist some mechanism by which the soul who truly loves the Lord and repents of sin is purified (in Latin, *purgatio*) and made ready for the eternal joys of Heaven. That mechanism must follow, logically, after death but take place prior to the entry into Heaven. “The Church gives the name Purgatory to this final purification of the elect, which is entirely different from the punishment of the damned” (Catechism of the Catholic Church 1031). Whatever that purgatorial, *purifying*, mechanism looks like, it’s an essential part of the Christian understanding of salvation.

All of this comes together to mean that the Catholic Funeral rituals are primarily about two duties: praying for the deceased and consoling the sorrow of the bereaved. As

such, a Catholic Funeral can never be reduced to a “celebration of life” or a “ceremony of remembrance.” The Catholic Funeral is a religious ritual marked by prayer to God and words of consolation to the bereaved.

A PRACTICAL TIMELINE OF THE CATHOLIC FUNERAL RITES

The Catholic Funeral typically requires a clergyman - either a bishop, a priest or a deacon. Out of courtesy, the clergyman should always be contacted and consulted prior to scheduling services and locations. Note that the Catholic Church limits the times at which certain services may be offered and the locations at which those services may be conducted. Services around Christmas and Easter and on Sundays are typically more limited than other times.

Ideally, a Catholic Funeral consists of three distinct moments of prayer: The Vigil, the Funeral Liturgy and the Interment.

The Vigil is typically held the evening before the Funeral Service at the time of the visitation - ideally the night before the interment. Its form varies widely from a simple sermon to the praying of the Rosary to a more formal service with scripture readings and other ritual prayers. The form of the vigil depends upon the clergyman and the preference of the family. Laypersons (non-clergy) may officiate at some forms of the vigil if the clergyman is unavailable.

The Holy Mass is the central prayer of the Catholic Church and the Funeral Mass is a specially adapted form of it which commends the departed soul to the Lord and seeks to console the family. The Funeral Mass may only be offered at a Catholic Church and never in a chapel. Scheduling the Church may require working around other events already taking place and so it should be done as soon as your clergyman is contacted. While a deacon may be present at the vigil and the interment, only a bishop or priest may celebrate the Funeral Mass.

The Funeral Mass is always preferred by the Church. Circumstances, however, may prohibit the celebration of the Funeral Mass or make it a less preferable option. For example, some or all family members may not be Catholic. The timeframe in which the family is available and the Church is available may not be compatible. A priest may not be available to offer the Mass. In these circumstances, the Church provides a ceremony called the Funeral Liturgy Outside Mass. This Liturgy may be offered by a bishop, priest or deacon at the Church or at the Funeral home chapel. In this case, it is laudable for the family to request their local pastor or another priest offer one or more Masses for the

deceased at some other time. Families should note that there is no prohibition of having a Funeral Mass if the body has been cremated.

The Form of the Funeral Mass is standardized. Once the casket arrives, it is placed on the cart and moved into the Church. Flower splays, civil flags and other adornments are removed. The priest (or bishop) greets the casket with words of blessing and sprinkles it with Holy Water. The casket is then covered with a large cloth (the pall). The priest precedes the casket down the main aisle of the Church and enters the sanctuary. The casket is arranged at the front of the Church near the large Easter Candle. Pews are typically reserved for Pall bearers and family. The Mass proceeds with readings from scripture, a sermon and other rituals. At the end of the service, the priest typically says "And now, let us take our brother\sister to his\her place of rest." Music may be played and the deceased is escorted out of the Church to the car or, if the cemetery is on-site and the interment is immediate, directly to the grave side. At the back door of the Church, the pall is removed and any items which have decorated the casket before may be replaced.

The Church requires that the mortal remains be interred. This includes cremated remains. It is not acceptable for a Catholic to keep the remains in a home or to separate or mix them for any reason. While the remains may be buried at sea or the interment may be temporarily postponed for a legitimate reason (weather, organ donation, etc), interment is mandatory. As such, an interment should be scheduled with a clergyman for the earliest convenient time - ideally immediately after the Funeral services.

SPECIFIC DECISIONS FOR PLANNING THE SERVICES

As noted above, there are three liturgies (ceremonies) to plan. These are religious rites and so there are limitations and specific requirements which must be maintained. Your clergyman will advise you when some request cannot be accommodated. This is why you should contact and schedule your clergyman before any other plans are made. For the most part, there is a generic outline of the rites which can be used if you don't wish to customize the entire Funeral. Both your clergyman and Funeral director are here to help, so please feel free to be open with them about your requests and circumstances.

Families should also note that their love for the deceased is not best shown by expensive caskets, videos or purchases of any sort... A beautiful Catholic Funeral does not require any of these things. Real love is shown by concern for his or her soul.

THE VIGIL

Format

There are two basic options for the format of the vigil. The formal ritual is called "The Vigil for the Deceased." It includes a sprinkling of the body, two readings from scripture, a psalm, a sermon, prayers for the deceased, intercessions ("Lord, hear our prayer"), a concluding prayer and a blessing.

The simpler and more common format consists of a non-liturgical ceremony including a sermon and the Rosary.

Music

Music associated with the Funeral ceremonies must be religious in nature and properly express the Catholic understanding of death and eternal life. Non-religious music may be played before or after the ceremony, but must not be part of it. Music directly associated with the Funeral Ceremonies must be sung or played by a soloist, a choir or the entire congregation. It is never possible to use "canned" or CD/Digital music during the ceremony.

Other Personalizations

If the vigil takes place in the funeral home chapel, the clergyman will typically leave the flowers and decorations on the casket. If the vigil takes place in the Church, the priest may choose to wear either white, purple or black vestments for the ceremony. While he is free to make this choice on his own, you are welcome to request one of those colors. Also, if the vigil takes place in the Church, the priest may choose to close the casket and veil it in a pall (again in white, purple or black).

THE FUNERAL MASS (OR THE FUNERAL LITURGY)

Mass v. Liturgy

Spiritually speaking, the Funeral Liturgy Outside of Mass and the Funeral Mass are not the same thing. The Mass is the making present of Jesus Christ's offering of Himself to the Father on the altar of the Cross for the Salvation of the World. It is the greatest of all prayers and the culmination of the 2000 years of Jewish worship which anticipated it! Put succinctly, it's spiritually powerful. The Funeral Liturgy is a beautifully arranged act of worship to God, but it is not the same as a Mass. There are certainly factors which may make the Funeral Liturgy preferable to the Funeral Mass, but they ought to be weighed against the spiritual value of the one over the other. If the service is to be held in the Church, either the Funeral Mass or the Funeral Liturgy may be offered. If the

service is to be held in another chapel, the Funeral Mass may not be offered and the only option is the Funeral Liturgy.

Music

As with the vigil, the Funeral Mass has specific musical requirements. Music must be religious and its words (if they are sung) must express proper belief. CD/Digital music may not be used. Typically, a choir or cantor can be provided by your clergyman or the local pastor.

Readings, Prayers, Sermon

The Funeral Mass has a number of suggested readings from the scriptures. There are also a number of possible prayers. If you have specific scriptures or prayers in mind, you can discuss these with the clergyman. Also, if you have specific notes or suggestions for his sermon, you are welcome to share them.

Servers, Ministers

The Funeral Mass, like any Catholic Mass, is aided by servers (“altar boys”) who may serve at the discretion of the pastor of the parish and your clergyman. The Funeral Mass is also aided by one or more lectors (“readers”) who proclaim the readings and intercessions. These lectors must be Catholics in good standing. There are some circumstances in which the clergyman may admit non-Catholics to this duty. If you have a non-Catholic person you want involved, please discuss it with your clergyman. Church law does not allow a non-Catholic minister or member of Protestant clergy to assist in the Funeral Mass in a public way.

Speakers, Eulogies

By Church law, the bishop or priest may not deliver a eulogy at the Catholic Funeral Mass. If you have some details of the deceased life or even a written eulogy which may assist the clergyman in composing his sermon, these would be most welcome. Church law also prohibits anyone who is not an ordained Catholic clergyman from preaching at the Funeral Mass. If you’d like to make an announcement (for example, inviting those present to a luncheon) or deliver a brief message (thanking everyone for attending), please discuss the matter with the clergyman.

Holy Communion

One of the great difficulties of inviting non-Catholics to a Catholic Funeral Mass is explaining the reasons why a non-Catholic (or a Catholic who is not in good standing) may not receive Holy Communion. Some Churches have an explanation on a card or in a hymnal or missalette, others do not. Some priests explain the matter briefly before communion; others do not. In short, the reasons are three: First, St. John’s Gospel

(chapter 6) instructs the Church to prevent anyone from receiving “without discernment;” second, Holy Communion, as the name implies, is a sign of shared faith and belief; third, the law of the Church instructs priests to prevent non-Catholics from receiving Holy Communion. If you are concerned that this aspect of the Funeral Mass may be problematic, bring the matter to the attention of your clergyman and ask his advice.

THE INTERMENT

Music

The ritual of the interment does not specifically mention music. While the rules of music during Funeral ceremonies outlined above still applies. Hymns may be sung in many different ways.

Civil Ceremonies

If the deceased is entitled to a civic, military or Church honor guard, these ceremonies are usually conducted after the religious ceremony. You should let the clergyman know of any other ceremonies to be offered so that he can coordinate with those ceremonies teams. Remember that some types of civil honors (like those associated with the Freemasons) cannot be accommodated.

THE EXTRAORDINARY FORM

Within the last several years, the Catholic Church has reinstated the more traditional form of the Funeral ceremonies which must be specifically requested by the deceased (or the family). This “Extraordinary Form” is sometimes called the Traditional Latin Requiem Mass. It is offered in Latin and has specific musical and liturgical requirements. While any Catholic is free to request this Form of the Church’s Liturgy, its availability may be limited. If you are interested in this type of Funeral Mass, please discuss the matter with your clergyman.

FEES, STIPENDS AND GIFTS

Catholic clergy do not charge for their spiritual services. To do so is considered a grave sin. If the family wishes to offer a gift to the clergyman for his efforts, he is free to accept it, but not to solicit it. Some funeral homes will take care of this optional detail for you, others will not - please check with your funeral director.

Fees associated with the use of the Church building and/or the cemetery must be discussed with the competent authorities as your clergyman may have no control over these matters. Family or Funeral directors should contact the pastor of the Church and the director of the cemetery for a schedule of fees and charges.

EMBALMING, CREMATION AND THE DIGNITY OF THE BODY

Catholics understand the body of the deceased to have a dignity in itself because God created human beings as a composite of body and soul. While the soul is immortal, the body deserves its own respect.

Historically, Christians did not cremate the dead as it was understood to be a Pagan custom and was seen as an act of desecration. In the last decades, that mentality has changed and modern Christians typically see cremation as merely one option among many without any particular doctrinal or spiritual implications. As such, the Catholic Church has lifted any bans on cremation, provided that the person makes the request without conscious reference to any unbelief in the resurrection of the body as the scriptures teach. That said, it is still considered far preferable to embalm and bury the body whole and entire.

As noted above, all remains must be interred. It is never possible for the cremated remains of the deceased to be indefinitely stored or enshrined in the home.

SOME COMMON REQUESTS

Of course, each family and each Funeral is unique, but there are common requests which are made of the Church from the family and from Funeral directors which we outline here. Some of those are possible, others are not.

- **Eulogies.** The custom of eulogizing the dead is very ancient and expected at many Funerals. While the Funeral Mass is limited to the preaching of Clergy exclusively, the Vigil, the visitation and the interment all give latitude to the clergyman to invite speakers of all sorts. It is not possible for the family to speak at length during the Funeral Mass or Liturgy, but the priest may accommodate a very short message from the family thanking all for attending. You'll need to discuss that option with your clergyman.
- **Non-Catholic Ministers or Clergy.** As noted in the section above, the Funeral Mass or Liturgy does not allow non-Catholic clergymen to speak. The vigil, visitation and interment are all appropriate venues to admit the words of a clergyman from another faith.
- **Hymns, Music.** The family may submit their requests for music of all sorts to their clergyman. These selections may represent religious or secular music and may be chosen for any reason. As noted, the three parts of the Funeral allow for a wide accommodation of requests. Music directly associated with the religious

ceremonies must be approved by your clergyman and may be limited by the competence of musicians available for the rituals. It is never acceptable to accompany a Catholic religious ceremony with “canned” or CD/Digital music. If the music cannot be performed as part of the ceremony, it should be played prior to or after the service. This is especially true of the Funeral Mass. Secular or popular music, even if it can be sung by live musicians, should typically not be performed in the course of the Funeral Mass or Liturgy. Final decisions on music are made by the clergyman.

- **Incense.** Some individuals are allergic or physically unable to tolerate the use of incense at the Funeral Mass. The Church understands this concern and the situation should be discussed with your clergyman.
- **Separation of the Cremated Remains.** There are now numerous options for incorporating the cremated remains into all kinds of memorials: paintings, concrete benches, memorial stones, etc. The practice of dividing the remains among the bereaved is also growing in popularity. The Church does not allow and cannot accommodate these options. The cremated remains must be interred intact.
- **Videos, DVD Slideshows.** The Church understands the value and power of a video slideshow and happily accommodates them in the proper venue. These systems should typically not be arranged in the Church itself, however. Also, the systems should be powered down during services.
- **Photographs.** Small photographs arranged near a guest book or larger photographs arranged in the Funeral home chapel are excellent and beautiful signs of love and remembrance. They should be removed from prominence, however, during the Funeral rituals.
- **Personal Items.** It has become common to include personal items of special significance to family and friends in the casket with the deceased or to have these items incorporated into the flower spray. This practice poses no problems. It should be noted, though, that during the Funeral Mass, the spray will be removed and replaced with a pall for the duration of the service.
- **Civic Customs & Honor Guards.** The placing of flags and the posting of civic honor guards poses no problems to the conduct of the Funeral Mass or other rituals. Typically, the honor guard is dismissed immediately before the ceremony and, if desired, can be recalled immediately afterward. For the Funeral Mass, the flag is removed and a pall placed. This may happen for the Vigil or Funeral Liturgy as well, or the civil flag may be left in place. The civic or military rituals at the moment of interment usually follow the religious rituals, but your clergyman may need to discuss this with those ceremony teams in advance.
- **Ethnic Customs.** The Catholic Church is present as a part of every culture in the world. Funeral Customs vary widely and should be discussed with your clergyman prior to finalizing plans.

- **Romani or “Gypsy” Funerals.** Catholic Clergy are not permitted to celebrate, participate in, authorize or forbid any rituals in which mourners may wish to participate outside of the Catholic rituals described in this book. That being said, pastors who operate cemeteries are free to prohibit behaviors of any kind on the cemetery property they administrate. Family or Funeral directors anticipating any non-religious events associated with the burial should discuss these with the clergyman right away.
- **The Freemasons.** Catholics are prohibited by Church law from joining or being an active member of the Freemasons. The reasons for this prohibition go back to the founding of that order five centuries ago. As such, no Catholic may, for any reason, be buried with Masonic rituals nor may those rituals be performed in any Catholic cemetery, even outside of the Catholic ceremonies.

A CATHOLIC OBITUARY

As noted, for the Catholic, death is a moment of hope in God and of sorrow for the loss of the deceased. The obituary ought to reflect these two emotions by attributing blessings received from God to God and recalling the good that the deceased did in his or her life - family, work, Church and community activities, etc. The obituary should not imply that the person is already in heaven, nor should it merely celebrate the life of the deceased. Ideally, Catholics should see the obituary as an opportunity to praise the deceased and the Lord at the same time.

WAYS TO SAVE MONEY

A simple Funeral costs a lot of money. Even with insurance and a middle class income, the costs can be prohibitive. At the same time, the Church understands that Funeral homes are businesses which have a moral obligation to pay their employees a fair salary. As a way to accommodate both parties, these ideas are suggested as a way to assist those looking to reduce the cost of the Funeral as much as possible.

- The Church building (or the Church hall) is typically available as a venue for the vigil and visitation, even overnight. Details may be discussed with the pastor of that Church (who may not be your clergyman).
- Simple, low-cost caskets are available from the Monks of St. Joseph Abbey, Covington, LA (985) 867-5161 and from TrappistCaskets.com. (Note: The Federal Trade Commission ruled that Funeral homes are required to and must agree to use caskets bought elsewhere. No surcharge or handling fee to those who wish to supply their own casket may be levied.)
- Most Catholic Cemeteries have plots available for those in genuine financial need.

- Catholic Charities may be able to lend assistance to those in genuine financial need. (318) 445-6424, Ext. 225

ACTS OF PRAYER AND MEMORIAL

Once the ceremonies have ended and everyone has gone home to begin moving on with life, the bereaved continue to grieve. These practices are common and are recommended to the bereaved as ongoing acts of mourning and prayer.

- Catholics may have Masses offered for the deceased in their local parish or in another Catholic Church. While it is typical practice in the United States to offer a \$5 stipend for each Mass requested, parishes are expected to honor requested Masses regardless of the presence or size of a donation.
- They may consider keeping the traditional anniversaries of one week, one month and one year. On these anniversaries, the bereaved may attend Mass together or gather at the graveside for special prayers or they may arrange an additional service of some sort with a local clergyman.
- Most Churches make provision for permanent or semi-permanent items which may be donated in honor of some person. These range from engraved pews to stained glass windows to hymnals and range in price from just a few dollars to several thousand dollars.

PRAYERS FOR THE GRIEVING

These prayers are provided as possible texts for obituary or memorial cards. They may also be of great assistance in your grieving.

- Lord Jesus, our Redeemer, You willingly gave Yourself up to death so that all people might be saved and pass from death into a new life. Listen to our prayers; look with love on Your people who mourn and pray for their dead brother/sister. Lord Jesus, You alone are holy and compassionate; forgive our brother/sister his/her sins. By dying You opened the gates of life for those who believe in You; do not let Your brother/sister be parted from You, but by Your glorious power give him/her light, joy, and peace in heaven where You live for ever and ever. Amen.
- Psalm 129 (130). Out of the depths I cry to you, O Lord. Lord, hear my voice! O let your ears be attentive To the voice of my pleading. If you, O Lord, should mark our guilt, Lord, who would survive? But with you is found forgiveness: For this we revere you. My soul is waiting for the Lord, I count on his word. My soul is longing for the Lord More than watchman for daybreak. Let the watchman count on daybreak And Israel on the Lord. Because with the Lord there is mercy And fullness of redemption. Israel indeed he will redeem From all its iniquity.

- God, Creator and Redeemer of all the faithful, grant to the souls of your servants and handmaids the forgiveness of all their sins. Through our devout prayers may they obtain the pardon which they have always desired. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen. Lord, hear our prayers; in your mercy, bring us to your place of peace and light the soul of your servant [Name], whom you have summoned from this world. Call [Name] to be numbered in the fellowship of your saints. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen
- O Lord, Mourn with me and comfort me. This is my time of deepest need. I will serve You with gladness; I will come before Your presence with singing. I shall love You, Lord With all my heart, and with all my soul, and with all my might. I fear not that which kills the body, for the soul lives forever. Amen.
- We have known the time for planting, for laughing and for dancing. The joys of happier days can never be taken from us. Let those joys soften the pain of our suffering now. May our acceptance of this time of sadness help to prepare us for future joys with you and with [Name] in your Kingdom of peace and love. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.
- Lord, the loss of our beloved [Name] is a weight and burden to us who mourn him/her. In this time of mourning we need to meet you who are meek and humble of heart. Give us rest for ourselves and bring [Name] into your presence forever. May we all be united one day in the love of your divine heart. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

THE PROCESS OF GRIEVING

Dr. Elisabeth Kübler-Ross, a respected expert in the psychology of grieving, identifies five basic steps or stages that almost all grieving persons will pass through as they mourn the loss of their loved ones. These stages represent a kind of cycle which is repeated, with decreasing emotional intensity, as time passes and the bereaved experience more peace with their loss.

The stages are:

- Denial - in which the grieving refuse to believe that the person has been lost or that the loss has any real emotional impact. For example, "I feel fine;" "This can't be happening, not to me;" "They're not really gone..." Denial is usually only a temporary defense. This feeling is generally replaced with heightened awareness of possessions and individuals that will be left behind after death. Denial can be a conscious or unconscious refusal to accept facts, information, or the reality of the situation.
- Anger - in which the grieving is angry with the deceased for leaving or making bad choices that led to death or with him or herself for any number of reasons. For example, "Why did they smoke? It's not fair!;" "How can this be happening to

me?;" ""Who is to blame?" Anger is frequently misdirected and can seem like an explosion, especially to close friends or family.

- Bargaining - in which the grieving rehearse choices which could have been made to prevent or effect the loss. For example, "I'd do anything for a few more months with them;" "If only I had... bought a safer car;" "If only they had... stopped smoking." This stage may be marked by a broad sense of regret and/or a compulsion to "put things right" in other areas of life.
- Depression - in which the grieving simply embraces sadness. Depression is physically marked by constant fatigue and tiredness. The lack of interest, appetite and libido can be dangerous if it goes on for too long unaddressed. While depression is a necessary part of grieving, it must not be overly indulged.
- Acceptance - in which the grieving understand in a deep way the loss and its effect and are able to "move on." For example, "I'm going to miss her, but I can't change it, so I'll continue to live my life." In this stage, the person ultimately realizes that the loss hurts, but the hurt is not debilitating.

Typically, this process will go on for some time with each stage being less and less jarring and dramatic as time passes. If the grieving person becomes stuck in any one stage for a long time (several weeks or months), it may be helpful to visit a clergyman or a professional counselor to assist in the mourning process.

Note: this simple explanation of grieving should not be interpreted as a substitute for professional assistance, nor is it intended to provide professional instruction. It is merely published here as a way of understanding the experience of loss.