

GUIDELINES FOR HOMILIES AND WORDS OF REMEMBRANCE IN THE ORDER OF CHRISTIAN FUNERALS

[Promulgated by Cardinal Rigali on April 17, 2006]

The Archdiocese of Philadelphia has established the following guidelines to provide direction to priests in the celebration of the Order of Christian Funerals, specifically regarding the homily and the “words of remembrance” at the Funeral liturgy. These guidelines not only pertain to the Funerals of the lay Christian faithful, but also to the Funerals of priests and deacons as well. They are not intended to serve as a comprehensive treatment which addresses all matters pertinent to the various Funeral rites.

I. BASIC PRINCIPLES (excerpts from the Order of Christian Funerals [OCF])

- A. “In the face of death, the Church confidently proclaims that God has created each person for eternal life and that Jesus, the Son of God, by His death and resurrection, has broken the chains of sin and death that bound humanity.” [OCF, no.1]
- B. “Christians celebrate the Funeral rites to offer worship, praise, and thanksgiving to God for the gift of a life which has now been returned to God, the author of life and the hope of the just.” [OCF, no. 5]
- C. The three principal ritual moments in the Christian Funeral rites are the Vigil (or Wake Service), the Funeral Liturgy, and the Committal. “The Mass, the memorial of Christ’s death and resurrection, is the principal celebration of the Christian Funeral.” [OCF, no. 5]
- D. “Among the priest’s responsibilities are:
 - 1. To be at the side of the sick and dying;
 - 2. To impart catechesis on the meaning of Christian death;
 - 3. To comfort the family of the deceased, to sustain them amid the anguish of their grief, to be as kind and helpful as possible, and, through the use of the resources provided and allowed in the ritual, to prepare with them a Funeral celebration that has meaning for them;
 - 4. Finally, to fit the liturgy for the dead into the total setting of the liturgical life of the parish and his own pastoral ministry.” [Ordo Exsequiarum, no. 25]

II. GUIDELINES REGARDING THE HOMILY

- A. “A brief homily based on the readings is always given after the Gospel reading at the Funeral liturgy. Attentive to the grief of those present, the homilist is to dwell on God’s compassionate love and on the Paschal Mystery of the Lord, as proclaimed in the Scripture readings. The homilist also helps the members of the assembly to understand that the mystery of God’s love and the mystery of Jesus’ victorious death and resurrection were present in the life and death of the deceased and that these mysteries are active in their own lives as well. Through the homily, members of the family and the community receive consolation and strength to face the death of one of their members with a hope nourished by the saving word of God.” [OCF, no. 27]
- B. In accord with the prescripts of the Code of Canon Law (canon 767, §1, and authentic interpretation of May 26, 1987), as well as the norms of the various liturgical books, the homily is always and exclusively reserved to a priest or deacon.
- C. The homily is never to be a eulogy [OCF, no. 27], that is, solely a commendation in praise of the deceased person. Rather, the homily is to indicate signs of the redeeming love of God as evident in the Scriptural readings and as made visible in the life of the deceased person. When appropriate, it can include elements of gratitude and praise for a life that had been blessed by God

III. GUIDELINES REGARDING “WORDS OF REMEMBRANCE”

- A. The Order of Christian Funerals provides for the possibility of “a member or a friend of the family speak[ing] in remembrance of the deceased before the final commendation begins.” [OCF, no. 197]
- B. As with the homily, these “words of remembrance” are not to constitute a eulogy as such. Rather, they are to express appreciation for the life of the deceased, or take the form of a prayer or other inspirational text.
- C. Only one family member or friend is to speak, and he or she is to be brief, speaking no more than three minutes.

- D. Because of the intensity of the emotions at the time of a Funeral, the “words of remembrance” should be consigned to writing. To ensure that these words are in harmony with the celebration, the script should be given to the priest celebrant in advance of the Funeral liturgy, so that he can make any suitable suggestions to help the “words of remembrance” convey the consolation of God’s love, grace, and mercy. These words, then, are intended to particularize the praise and gratitude to God for His gifts to the deceased, especially the gift of the Christian life.
- E. Those who wish to give a eulogy or to share a story about the deceased more fittingly do so during the Vigil (Viewing/Wake) at the Funeral home, or following the Committal at the cemetery. A biography of the deceased could be included in the printed worship aid, if one is prepared for the Funeral liturgy.

IV. CONCLUDING PRINCIPLE

These guidelines, and as with all the norms regulating Christian Funerals, are intended to assist the priest celebrant, family members and friends to celebrate the Funeral rites “in an atmosphere of simple beauty, in a setting that encourages participation...affirming Christian belief and hope in the Paschal Mystery.” [OCF, no. 21]