

Why We Should Not Forego the Funeral

-finding hope in the celebration of the Catholic funeral rituals

Part II in our series on Facing Death in Changing Times

*A private interment has taken place...
At the request of the deceased, there will
be no funeral celebration...*

Practices that were once perceived as secular trends are quickly becoming the preferred options among a growing number of Catholics in Manitoba. Memorial services in funeral homes, graveside ceremonies, and ‘celebrations of life’ in hotels or country clubs are perceived as viable options by many, and sadly, the decision to forego funeral rituals altogether is also a reality. While many variables influence these decisions, the outcome is usually determined by those planning the funeral. Although the deceased may have wanted the celebration of Catholic funeral rituals, the family members may choose otherwise if they are no longer practicing their faith, or if they feel that the rituals of the Church will be unfamiliar to family members and friends. Sometimes



even the dying are making this request in an effort to make things ‘simpler’ for their families. Either way, it is a sad reality for the deceased, the bereaved family and the members of the Christian community, as all are deprived of the beauty and hope celebrated through the Catholic funeral rituals.

Death is not a problem to be solved, but rather a mystery to experience. Our Christian Catholic faith celebrates the death of a Christian by placing it within the context of our life in Jesus. “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.” (Order of Christian Funerals) Funeral rites help the

bereaved enter more fully into the process of grieving. They support a healthy grieving process, which encompasses a series of experiences that move the bereaved through the mystery of death: accepting the reality of death, expressing sadness at the loss of a loved one, remembering the deceased within the context of their faith journey, gathering as a Christian community around the bereaved, being nourished at the Eucharistic table, and proclaiming hope in the resurrection of Jesus and the promise of eternal life. The ritual celebration can be a special time of grace for grieving families, and can plant the seed for spiritual growth and transformation.



The Catholic funeral ritual celebration helps situate us in the larger context of our baptismal journey. We acknowledge our identity as children of God and members of the Christian community - an identity bestowed upon us through the sacrament of baptism, which immersed us into life with Christ, and into life with one another. We celebrate the death of a Christian because we believe that physical death does not mark the end of our loved one's life, nor the relationships forged with the deceased. Death is celebrated as the transition from our earthly pilgrimage to our eternal pilgrimage in God. We give thanks for the very gift of our loved one, whom we now return to God. In doing so, we are not only reminded of who



God is, but also of who we are in the greater context of our human story. Ultimately the way we die and the way we celebrate the death of others is a reflection of our dignity as children of God.

The Catholic funeral is meant for the deceased as well as the loved ones who are left in sorrow. It is a proclamation of our faith in the resurrection of Jesus. It is an expression of the value we place on human life, the hope we have for the deceased and the care and

compassion we have for those who grieve.

Monique Gauthier
Columbarium Representative