

Christian Burial

Please read before the lesson to prepare

Most students will have been to a funeral or seen one on TV. They probably know that there is a special way that we say good bye to the dead. Since the early days of the Church, Catholics have understood burying/interring the dead as a corporal work of mercy and celebrated a distinct liturgy for the deceased. The funeral liturgy takes place in three parts: The Vigil—as family gathers to console one another and honor the memory of the deceased; the Funeral Mass—the sacred liturgy that commends the deceased to the mercy of God; and the Rite of Committal—the final act of the community in bringing the deceased to their place of burial.

This session is meant to teach students the central aspects of the Catholic burial rite and how it both honors the deceased and offers consolation to the family.

Below are some Bible and Catechism quotes that will help you to prepare for this lesson.

Bible Quotations

“Or are you unaware that we who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were indeed buried with him through baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might live in newness of life.” – *Romans 6:3-4*

“but now made manifest through the appearance of our savior Christ Jesus, who destroyed death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.” – *2 Tim 1:10*

“For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him might not perish but might have eternal life.” – *John 3:16*

“Jesus wept.” – *John 11:35*



Catechism Quotations

CCC 1685 – “The different funeral rites express the Paschal character of Christian death and are in keeping with the situations and traditions of each region, even as to the color of the liturgical vestments worn.”

CCC 1686 – “*The Order of Christian Funerals* of the Roman liturgy gives three types of funeral celebrations, corresponding to the three places in which they are conducted (the home, the church, and the cemetery), and according to the importance attached to them by the family, local customs, the culture, and popular piety. This order of celebration is common to all the liturgical traditions and comprises four principal elements. [The Greeting of the Community, the Liturgy of the Word, the Eucharistic Sacrifice, and the Farewell].”



CCC 1689 – “*The Eucharistic Sacrifice.* When the celebration takes place in church the Eucharist is the heart of the Paschal reality of Christian death.¹⁹⁰ In the Eucharist, the Church expresses her efficacious communion with the departed: offering to the Father in the Holy Spirit the sacrifice of the death and resurrection of Christ, she asks to purify his child of his sins and their consequences, and to admit him to the Paschal fullness of the table of the Kingdom. It is by the Eucharist thus celebrated that the community of the faithful, especially the family of the deceased, learn to live in communion with the one who ‘has fallen asleep in the Lord,’ by communicating in the Body of Christ of which he is a living member and, then, by praying for him and with him.”

CCC 1690 – “*A farewell* to the deceased is his final ‘commendation to God’ by the Church. It is “the last farewell by which the Christian community greets one of its members before his body is brought to its tomb.”¹⁹² The Byzantine tradition expresses this by the kiss of farewell to the deceased:

By this final greeting “we sing for his departure from this life and separation from us, but also because there is a communion and a reunion. For even dead, we are not at 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.”



The Three Sacred Moments of a Catholic Funeral



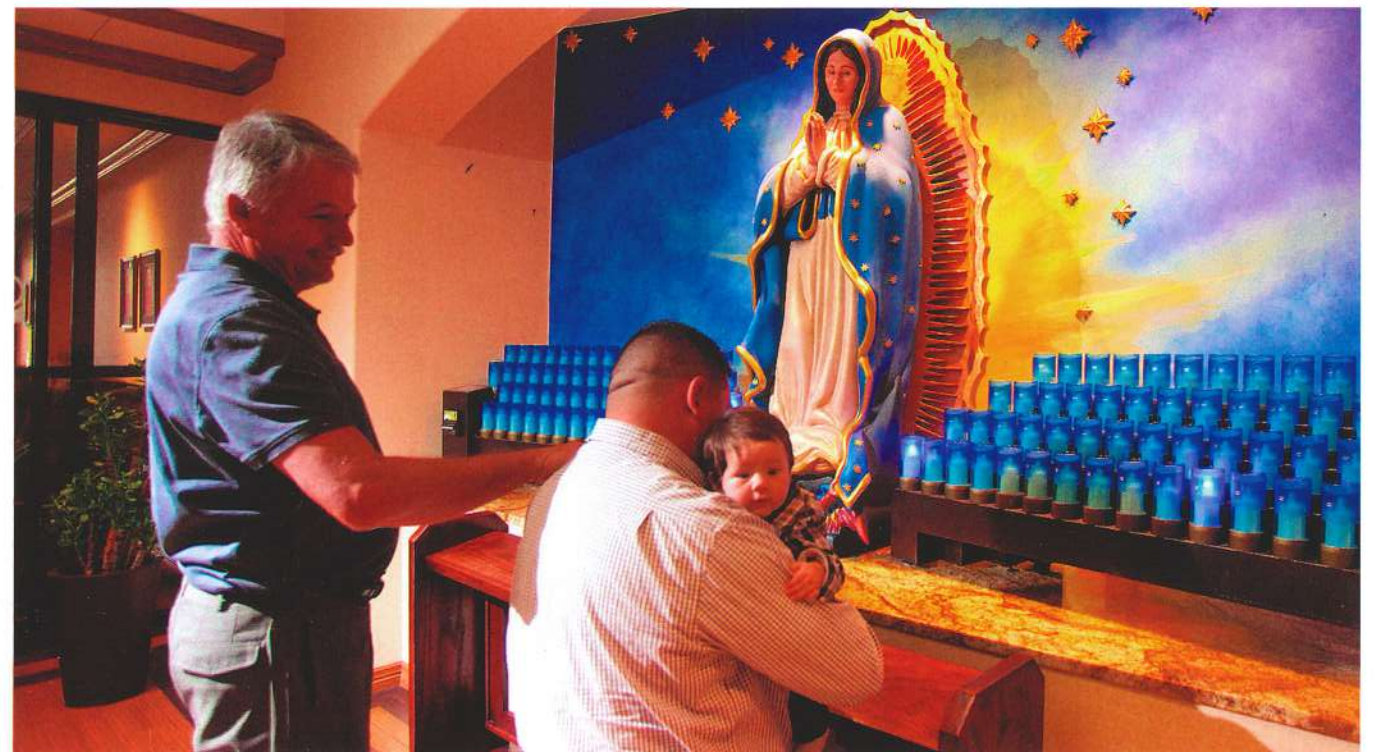
The Vigil. The rite celebrated by the Christian community in the time following death and before the funeral liturgy. It is a time when loved ones show their respect and greet the family and friends of the deceased. It is also the most ideal time to share their memories of the deceased through a eulogy or video tribute, usually held at the funeral home the day before the Funeral Mass.



Funeral Mass. This is the central liturgical celebration held with the deceased’s body present at a church. Part of Catholic belief is that those who follow the way of Jesus shall forever be in Heaven, body and soul, in the presence of God. We believe in the bodily resurrection. Also, the Church honors the body because it has been the temple of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, the Church says that the body should be present at the funeral rites. If cremation is selected, the Church prefers that the body be present at the Mass.



Rite of Committal. This rite is the final act of our faith community in caring for the body of its deceased member. By our presence at this rite, we help the mourners face the end of one relationship with the deceased and the beginning of a new one based on prayerful remembrance, gratitude and the hope of resurrection and reunion. The celebration, whenever possible, takes place not in a cemetery chapel but at the open grave or place of interment. The act of committal expresses that the grave, once a sign of despair, is now, through Christ’s own death and resurrection, a sign of hope and promise. The Church encourages all Catholics to seek out a Catholic Cemetery that has been blessed and consecrated as a final resting place.



Opening Prayer

The prayer that is said at the graveside, modify to suit your use as needed.

Lord Jesus Christ,
by Your own three days in the tomb,
You hallowed the graves of all who
believe in You
and so made the grave a sign of hope
that promises resurrection
even as it claims our mortal bodies.

Grant that our brother and sisters may sleep
here in peace
until You awaken them to glory,
for You are the resurrection and the life.
Then they will see You face to face
and in Your light will see light
and know the splendor of God,
for You live and reign forever and ever. Amen.

1) Proclamation

We are created for communion with God and with one another. God made us to know, love and serve Him. When our life on earth ends, there is a special celebration called a funeral where the deceased are remembered, commended to the mercy of God and buried or interred in a special place called a cemetery.



2) Explanation

Typically, in the Diocese of Phoenix, this age group will have been introduced to the central tenets of our faith as they prepare for Confirmation and 1st Eucharist. For this reason, a more detailed Catechesis on death, resurrection, and the funeral rite are appropriate.

Suggested question prompts:

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| <p>1) Q. Who knows what the word <i>resurrection</i> means?
A. The word resurrection means that after we die, we will rise up again. We will come back to life . . .</p> <p>2) Q. Who knows where we go when we die?
A. God loves us so much He wants us to be with Him and sent His only begotten Son Jesus to save us from sin and death, so that we might live with Him in heaven . . .</p> | <p>3) Q. Who knows what we call the special celebration we have when somebody dies?
A. A funeral. A funeral is a special time when we commend the person who has died to the mercy of God and, as Christians, pray for them that through their faith in Jesus Christ they will share in His resurrection.</p> |
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4) Q. What happens at a funeral?

A. The family gathers to remember the person who died. First, there is usually a Vigil the night before the funeral to remember the deceased and share stories. Often a rosary is said, and friends and family gather to console each other. Second, there is the Funeral Mass, where the Church offers up the prayers for the deceased, and is joined by all the saints and the community of the faithful. Third, there is a committal rite, where the body or the cremated remains are buried or interred.

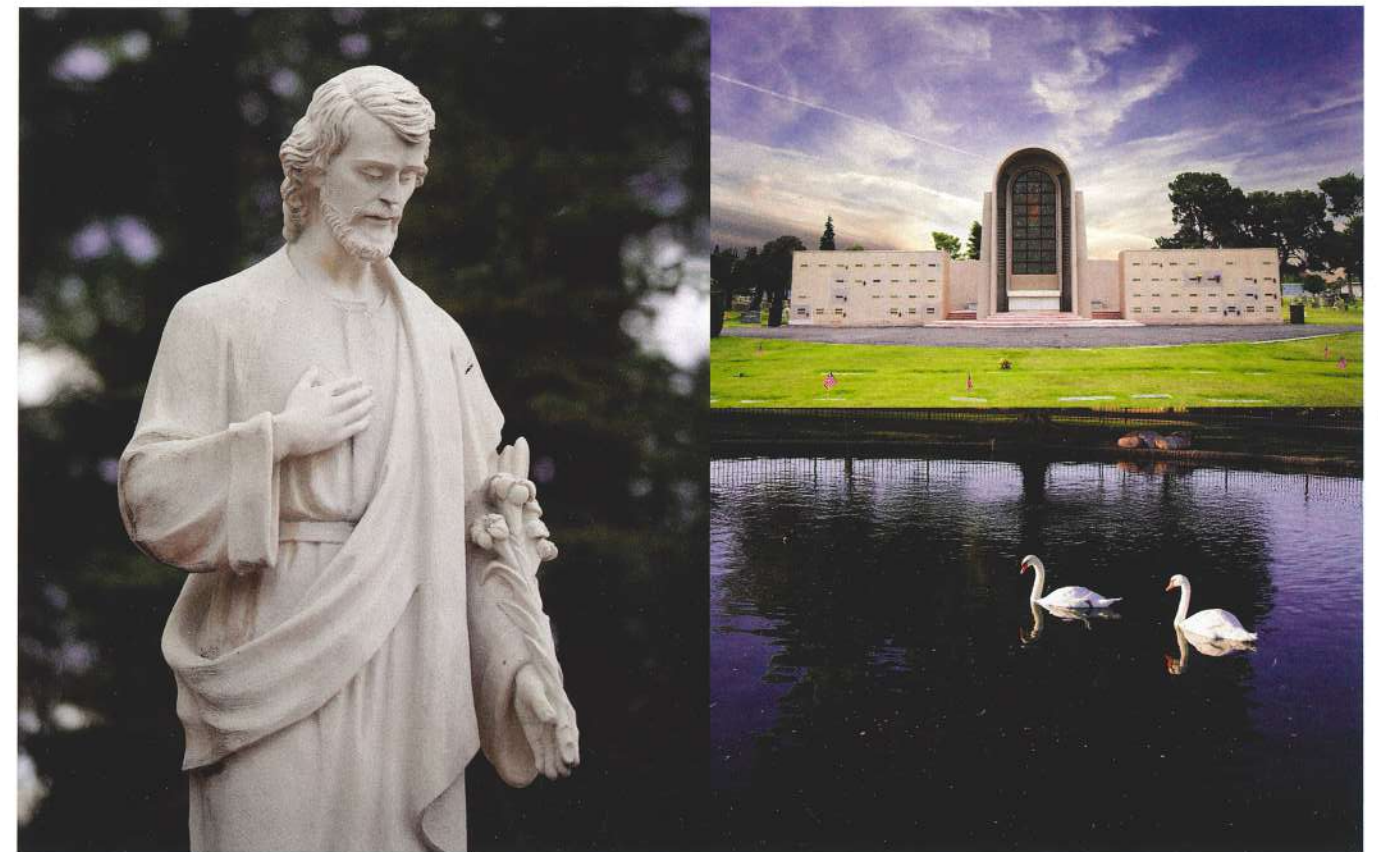
Note: Depending on their experience answers may differ widely

5) Q. How do we relate to our friends and family who have died?

A. As followers of Christ, we know that death does not separate us. Even though we no longer see the person who has died walking on this earth, they are still alive with Jesus and the saints, we can still talk to them like we talk to God when we pray. They hear us and can help us.

6) Q. When does the Church pray for all of our loved ones who have died?

A. At Mass, during funerals, at cemeteries, and at home or in church, we can pray for our family members and all who have died. On All Saints Day on November 1st, we ask for the prayers of all those saints who are alive with Jesus in Heaven. On All Souls Day we pray for all those who have died, especially our family and friends . . .



Teaching

Witness:

- If appropriate, share a story of a funeral you attended, share what happened focusing on the two most important aspects,
 - 1) The dead was commended to the mercy of God.
 - 2) The grieving were consoled and given an opportunity to mourn the loss of their loved one.

Catechesis (main points to cover):

- Jesus loves us so much He wants us to know the joy of living His way of holiness. He wants us all to one day be with Him in the joy and happiness of heaven.
- When someone dies, we have a special way of remembering and honoring them called a funeral which prepares the person who has died to enter into new and everlasting life with Jesus and helps the family mourn their loss.
- Usually the funeral has three distinct parts.
 - 1) The Vigil
 - 2) The Funeral Liturgy
 - 3) The Rite of Committal
- We pray for our family and friends who have died hoping that they will experience the love and mercy of God, and we ask for their prayers

and intercession to help us grow in holiness and to love God with all our hearts.

- We believe that we will be reunited with our family and friends and all those who are in heaven.

3) Application

Guided reflection and discussion

- Activity Sheet “The Christian Funeral”
 - Help students fill in the worksheet.
- Key points to reinforce.
 - The funeral entrusts the person who has died to the mercy of God.
 - The funeral provides consolation and healing for those who mourn.
 - The funeral includes the Vigil, Funeral Mass and Rite of Committal (burial).
 - It has been the tradition of the Church to pray for and bury or inter the dead through the funeral liturgy.
 - The proper place to celebrate the Funeral Mass is in the Church.
- Recommended Video Resource: Fr. Mike Schmidt “The Real Purpose of Funerals” ascensionpresents.com/video/the-real-purpose-of-funerals



4) Celebration

Finish the lesson by reinforcing any key points and offering a concluding prayer/meditation inviting children to pray for any family members and friends who have died.

Suggested meditation: Have the children close their eyes . . . close your eyes and picture your family members and any friends who have died rejoicing with great joy in heaven with Jesus and all the saints, laughing, talking, sharing stories, praying. Imagine those family members who you may have known, and those who died long ago. How many of you can picture them all rejoicing in heaven? Who are remembering? Can you picture them in your mind? Now think about this. . . their rejoicing will never have to come to an end, they will never have any bad news to make them sad, they won't have to stop their heavenly joy for chores to do. Everything that they do will be filled with joy and they will be made

perfect in the kingdom of heaven. Their joy will last forever, no one will ever die again!

Now open your eyes. What did you see? (Let them share) Who was there? Isn't heaven wonderful. This is what we were made for. God wants us to be with Him in heaven, which is why we want to know and live for Him on earth, and why we pray for our family and friends who have died, that they would experience this joy.

Let's pray and ask everyone in heaven to help us. I will say the prayer out loud and you can pray silently in your hearts.

Dear God, thank you for preparing such a beautiful place for us. We are so excited for the celebration we will have when we get to heaven. We ask all the angels and saints to help us whenever we need it and most of all to help us get to heaven one day, so that we might rejoice with our family and friends who are there praying for and interceding for us.





The Christian Funeral

Jesus said “In my Father’s house there are many dwelling places . . . I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back again and take you to Myself, so that where I am you also may be” – *John 14:2,3*

Directions

Match the descriptions with the part of the funeral that best fits.
Add to description of what happens during each part of the funeral.

Parts of the Funeral

1) The Vigil



2) The Funeral Mass



3) The Committal Rite



Descriptions

- A) The Church offers their prayers for the dead and celebrates the Mass.

- B) The family gathers before the Funeral Mass to share memories, say goodbye to their loved one, and offer prayers.

- C) The family goes to the cemetery for the burial or interment of their deceased loved one.
