

# UNDERSTANDING SYMBOLS *in* *the* CATHOLIC FUNERAL MASS



Catholic Cemeteries  
Archdiocese of Vancouver

GARDENS OF

*Gethsemani*

**M**any of the symbols used during the funeral liturgy reflect the sacrament of **Baptism**—it is through Baptism that our loved one has already shared Christ's death and Resurrection. At the Funeral Mass, we offer worship, praise and thanksgiving to God, we are strengthened by our belief in the Resurrection and find strength and consolation through our faith in God.



**The Reception of the Deceased** at the entrance to the church is a reminder that the church is the home of all Christians. At Baptism, we were received at the same door and the sprinkling of holy water at this time reminds us of the person's Baptism and initiation into the community of faith.



**The Placing of the Pall** on the casket serves to remind us of the white garment received at Baptism and reminds us too that we are all equal in the eyes of God.



**The Paschal Candle** reminds us of Christ, the Light of the World, His victory over sin and death and of our share in that victory by virtue of our Baptism. The Paschal candle reminds us of the Easter vigil, the night when we await the Lord's Resurrection and when new light for the living and the dead is kindled.



**Incense** is used during the final commendation at the Funeral Mass as a sign of honour to the body of the deceased, which through Baptism became

the temple of the Holy Spirit. It is also a sign of our prayers for the deceased rising to our Lord and as a symbol of farewell.



**The Cross** that is usually placed in or on the casket is a reminder that we, as Christians, were marked with the cross in Baptism and through Jesus' suffering on the cross, we are brought to His Resurrection.



**White Vestments**, the colour used through the Easter season of the Church are worn by the presiding priest as an expression of Christian joy. Purple or black may also be used.



**The Readings, Prayers and Psalms** proclaim to us the promise of eternal life, convey the hope of being gathered together again in God's kingdom and support the witness of Christian life. Family members also have the choice of choosing the readings and the psalm appropriate for their loved one. During the Funeral Mass a total of three readings are recommended. Family or friends of the deceased are welcome to proclaim the first two readings while the priest or deacon proclaims the Gospel.



**The Presentation of the Gifts** is the ritual in which bread, wine and water are brought to the altar. Family members or friends of the deceased are invited to serve as gift bearers and in so doing serve as a reminder to all present of our commitment to become what we will soon share—the Body

and Blood of Christ. Family members that are non-practicing Catholics can come up to the altar to receive a blessing at communion. (*Place your right hand across and touch your shoulder*)



**The Final Commendation** at the end of Mass expresses our farewell and shows honour to one of its members, a temple of the Holy Spirit, before the body is buried. At this time the celebrant incenses the deceased, as together we entrust our loved one to our Lord and profess that we will share the Resurrection with our loved one on the last day.



**The Rite of Committal** is the final act of the community of faith in caring for the body of its deceased member. It marks the physical separation of the deceased from the mourners. It may be celebrated at the grave, at a cemetery chapel, or a crematorium. Through this simple rite, the Church assists us as we complete our care of the deceased and lay the body to rest.



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