

A Time to Reflect....

When planning the funeral liturgy it is recommended to involve the family of the deceased in the planning of the funeral in the planning of the celebration, choosing the readings and songs to be used, and encouraging family members or friends to do the readings. Over the years a practice has developed of having someone from the family offer some **Words of Remembrance** concerning the life and faith of the deceased. (I purposely do not use the word **Eulogy**)

Recently I asked if someone in the family wanted to share some Words of Remembrance and those I asked thought there was someone who would. When I had the opportunity to ask him directly he told me that he would not say anything at the funeral but would probably speak when the family gathered together after the funeral. He thought that what he would say fit better at that type of gathering rather than at the funeral mass. In the years since they first allowed someone to speak I have never gotten that type of response. I thought to myself, he knew the difference between a Eulogy and Words of Remembrance.

Our parish planning aid for funerals explains the role of the **Words of Remembrance**;

“to specifically remember the deceased in a way that is consistent with the liturgical tone of hope and focus upon how the deceased person lived their faith and how that daily living helped the family believe more firmly.”

On the other hand a Eulogy is given to praise the individual and does not necessarily focus on the person's faith or connect with *“the liturgy's focus on Jesus' saving actions and praying for the repose of the person's soul.”* (Our Sunday Visitor Newsweekly) A Eulogy can be given at a mercy meal or sometime during the wake. It can also be written out and distributed to those paying their respects. We need to remember the importance of sharing stories about the deceased with family and friends and how very valuable they are in the grieving process. However, the Words of Remembrance is not just a collection of stories. I have heard some Words that were better than many a homily I've heard and some that made me squirm in my seat.

My earliest experience of a funeral was when my grandfather died. I was 11 years old and living in New York. The wake (calling hours) lasted for three days. It was like a marathon for the family. Most wakes now are only a few hours. When I was stationed at St. Thomas of Villanova in Rosemont, it was a rare occasion that I went to the funeral home for a wake, they were usually in the church about an hour or so before the funeral mass. Sometimes the wakes were in the evening as was the mass, giving more people the opportunity to fully participate with the family. In these cases the burial was private the next morning. Funeral practices can vary depending on where you live and also the needs and desires of the family.

As I come to the end of this reflection, I realize that there are many more things that can be said as we honor our deceased and appreciate how we pray for them. I think I have only scratched the surface but hope that what I have shared has been helpful. I know that I am thankful for the opportunity to write these reflections. As a priest I also know how difficult the loss of a loved one can be. We all have gone through this type of loss but our faith, hope, and love, expressed in our funeral rituals can lift us up!!

I think the Order of Christian Funerals states very clearly what I have been trying to say:

“At the death of a Christian, whose life of faith was begun in the waters of baptism and strengthened at the Eucharistic table, the Church intercede on behalf of the deceased because of its confident belief that death is not the end, nor does it break the bonds forged in life. The Church also ministers to the sorrowing and consoles them in the funeral rites with the comforting Word of God and the Sacrament of the Eucharist.” (no.4)

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