

CATHOLIC FUNERAL TRADITIONS

Elements of the Catholic funeral

Catholic vigil (wake)

The Catholic vigil, also known as a wake, generally follows the death but takes place before the funeral mass and the burial. It may be held at a Catholic church, a funeral home, the family home or an alternate location. During this time, those in attendance offer prayers and condolences to the family and may observe the scripture through readings and reflections. Eulogies, singing and poetry readings may also be offered during the vigil.

Catholic funeral Mass (also called the Requiem Mass)

The funeral or memorial mass is traditionally held at the church. The casket or urn is often sprinkled with holy water when carried into the church, and symbols of the Christian faith such as an open Bible or crucifix may be placed on the casket. The first few rows of pews at the funeral mass are likely to be reserved for close family.

Non-Catholics in attendance are invited to participate in, or sit and witness, the service but should bear in mind that only Catholics will receive the communion. Most services will be formal but customized to the wishes of the family in regard to choice of music and readings. Families may wish to further personalize the service through a variety of options which can be discussed with a Dignity Memorial planning professional.

Catholic burial and cremation

After the ceremony, a gathering may take place at a cemetery or mausoleum for the rite of passage, or burial, during which the casket or urn is committed to the final resting place. Catholicism maintains the position that cremated remains must be committed to a consecrated site. Urns and other cremation containers are not permitted to be stored in a home, nor can ashes be scattered. Dignity Memorial cemeteries have a wide variety of property tailored to those who choose either [traditional burial or cremation](#).

Catholic funeral etiquette

[Flowers](#) are generally acceptable and may be sent to the family's home or to the funeral home. Charitable donations may also be offered to a church or charity chosen by the family. At the Catholic funeral, traditional attire is modest and dark in color; however, as [celebrations of life](#) become more common, personalized clothing or color choices may be acceptable. This is especially true at a celebration of life service, which may be held within the following weeks. If a guest book is provided, visitors are encouraged to sign. Oftentimes, memorial votive candles are present near the front or rear of the Catholic church and can be lit ceremonially. This Catholic funeral tradition is a gesture of remembrance, and a small monetary donation may be offered in a box located nearby.

Planning the Catholic funeral