

On Death XIX

Proper decorum, what is the best course of action to eulogize?

Time was when Catholics knew what a Catholic funeral was supposed to be. Now, it seems that there are all sorts of cultural aberrations that have crept into the Church. Some of these cultural practices, which I will mention, further on, render a Catholic funeral impossible, but some are helpful. First let me give a sketch of what is “correct” and “best” procedure for the Catholic who has died. For one who has died in the arms of the Church, the full funeral includes a vigil the night before the actual funeral mass. In the past the vigil or wake was a rosary. Now the vigil consists of a couple readings from scripture, a short reflection by the officiant, perhaps the rosary, or part of a rosary, and an opportunity for people to share about the deceased. If the deceased prayed the rosary regularly even daily, the offering of that venerable prayer seems most apt; sadly often the only practicing Catholic at a funeral is the deceased, and for a group of non-practicing or non-Catholics the rosary is at best unusual and at worse meaningless. For our present culture perhaps the most meaningful practice is the sharing; it is important for the grieving, to process their grief and one of the best ways to do that is by means of telling stories. Most people are unaccustomed to speaking in public, and doing so in the Church before a group of people seems like an impossible task. However in the relative intimacy of the Mortuary often people who would otherwise not say a word can be roused to speak. The vigil is the best place for an “open mike” when that would be discouraged at the funeral mass.

IHM Pray for us.

Fr. Jerry