

On Death XXI

The order of the funeral 2

At a Catholic funeral the casket is covered with a large white cloth called a “Pall” — making us all equal in death. It often is left open at the vigil, however. The Pall also symbolizes the baptismal white garment; other signs of baptism are placed on the casket: a cross, and the Book of the gospels. The family can participate by placing these “Christian signs.” Communion is the best way to “remember” to connect “Do this in memory of me” with the deceased’s memory. Most priests these days include some personal elements in the homily, but the Mass is not chiefly a remembrance of details of the deceased’s life, but a prayer in which the people of God place the memory of the deceased into the larger context of the life, death and resurrection of Christ. The Mass is individual life with that of Jesus. Still personal remembrances are appropriate, and even when the priest did not know the deceased; we usually meet with the family to gain some insight into their character and manner of life. For me personally the Mass is the place where I can place my memory of the dead into the hands of Christ so that as I eat and drink with Jesus in His Kingdom, I am eating and drinking in the company of the deceased. Certainly the Catholic context of placing our life and death in relation to the death of Jesus and his self-sharing in Communion makes sense out of what otherwise might not make any sense at all.

IHM Pray for us.

Fr. Jerry