

On Death XXII

The completion of the funeral and the process of grief.

Toward the end of the mass remembrances are often given; these are called “eulogies” and one or two people are selected to give personal remembrance of the dead. These should be short and well prepared in advance, and only one or at most two short ones are permitted in this parish. I discourage the “open mike” at the mass, because it is really appropriate to the vigil, but also because most people feel uncomfortable going up to the Ambo to speak. Following the eulogy there is the “song of farewell” which is sung as the celebrant burns incense around the casket. This is an ancient ceremony and helps us to picture the person’s soul moving toward God. By liturgical law there is no incense or song of farewell at a funeral where cremains are present. The mass ends abruptly after a prayer of commendation in which we present the dead to God, and preparation is made to transport the body to the cemetery. The third movement of the Catholic funeral is the burial. The mass actually does not end at the Church, and the final blessing is only given at the grave. Many customs have appeared around the grave, but the service itself is very short and to the point. The “highlight” is the praying of the Our Father preceded by the prayer that speaks of committing his or her body to the earth “for we are dust and to dust we shall return.” After the final blessing the coffin may be lowered into the grave, and people often throw flowers or other mementos into the grave as a way of expressing their farewell and their grief. I have often noted at the grave, especially at a very sad funeral of a child or a young person, as the coffin is lowered the pain subsides in the assembly. There is finality and a sense that all things have been accomplished.

IHM Pray for us.

Fr. Jerry