

“YEAR OF THE EUCHARIST”—FUNERAL MASS QUESTIONS—BY FR. STEVE LAPE

Over the years, I’ve been approached by a number of people who have inquired about matters related to the funeral mass. Here are a few of them for your own consideration:

If I received Communion at a daily Mass, can I receive again at a funeral that same day? Yes, but only at a Mass, not at a Communion service. Twice in a day is the usual limit. Before a change came in the 1983 Code of Canon Law for the Catholic Church, the Catholic faithful usually could only receive once. With the change clarified in canon 917 in the 1983 Code, the faithful were granted permission to receive a 2nd time at Mass during a day, so long as they were doing so worthily (a Catholic in good standing, free of grave sin).

Are cremains allowed to be in the church for a Catholic funeral? Yes. The Church’s ban on cremation remained until its lifting in 1963, being allowed so long as it is not done out of contempt for the Church or its teaching on the bodily resurrection of the dead. Quite often today, it’s done for financial reasons. It has only been since 1997 when the Church allowed cremains to be present at funeral Masses. Yet, the Church has remained very clear that cremains must be shown the same dignity and respect as bodily remains are. That means cremains should be buried in a cemetery or interred in an above-ground crypt or mausoleum, just as a bodily grave site offers family, friends, and others a place of peace and reflection. Such a site honors that loved one’s memory and offers a chance to think about one’s own mortality and faith relationship with God. Scattering ashes is never appropriate.

Can pop songs be used in a funeral mass in church? Secular music is not permitted during a Mass, since everything in the Mass—the prayers, the readings, the music, and other elements—should be somehow pointing to Jesus Christ, who is our Lord God, the Resurrection & the Life. To have, for example, a Frank Sinatra or a Bette Midler song played during Mass just because the deceased person liked that song or artist, or because the song is meaningful to a family member, would be the equivalent of playing “Jingle Bells” in the heat of July, meaning that it’s out of its originally intended appropriate context.

Can eulogies be given in a funeral Mass? According to the book called the Order of Christian Funerals, approved for use by Catholic clergy in the U.S., it states: “A brief homily based on the readings should always be given at the funeral liturgy, but never a eulogy of any kind.” (#141) However, it also says: “A member or a friend of the family may speak (after Communion) in remembrance of the deceased before the final commendation.” (#170)

We should always remember that Jesus Christ and His saving, merciful love should always be the main focus of any funeral. A eulogy tends to over-emphasize focus on the dead person. Brief words of remembrance, suggested by #170, are more spiritually-oriented, focusing on giving God thanks & emphasizing Christ in the person’s life.

