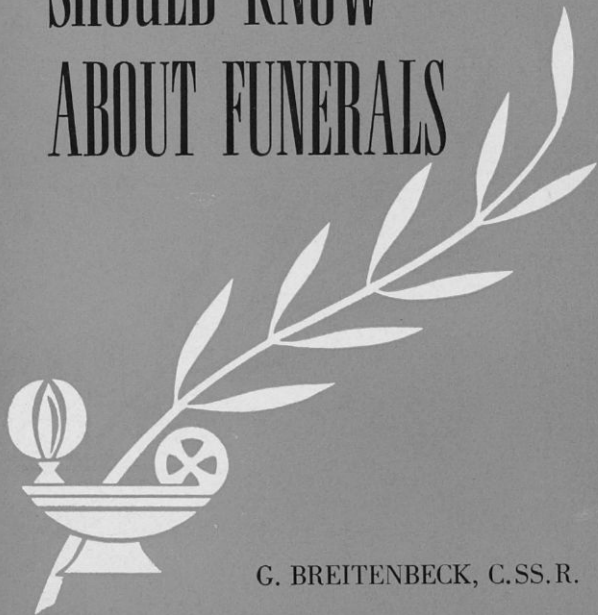


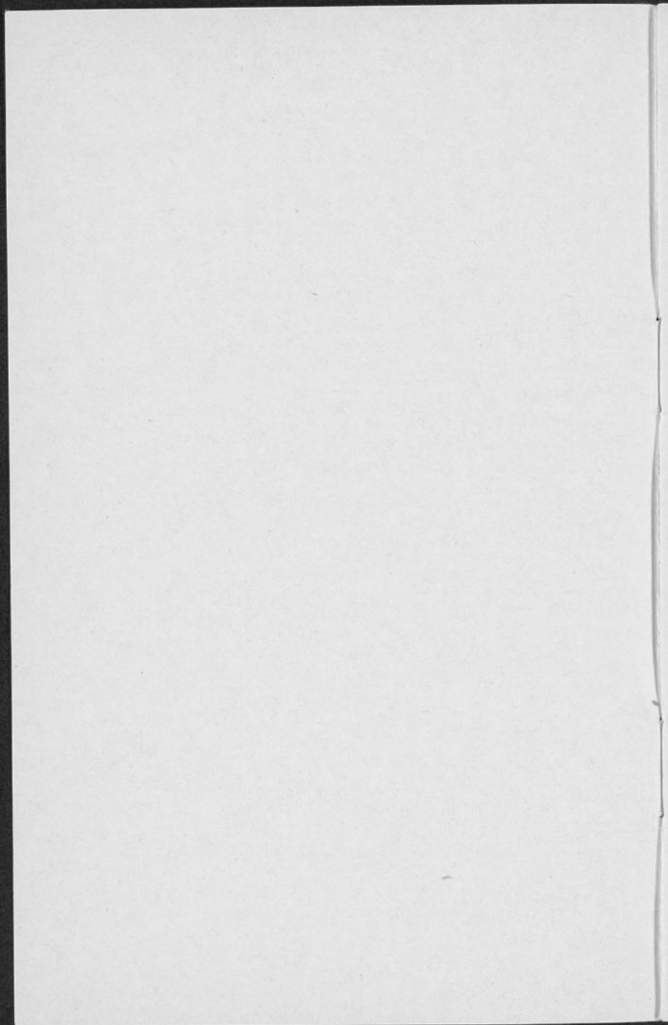
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WHAT  
EVERY FAMILY  
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ABOUT FUNERALS



G. BREITENBECK, C.S.S.R.



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LIGUORIAN PAMPHLETS  
REDEMPTORIST FATHERS  
Liguori, Missouri

*The suggestions in this pamphlet, worked out by experts, may help greatly to avoid confusion and tragic mistakes, and to lighten the burden of sorrow at the death of a member of the family.*

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John N. McCormick, C.S.S.R.  
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✠ Joseph Cardinal Ritter  
Archbishop of St. Louis

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## WHAT EVERY FAMILY SHOULD KNOW ABOUT FUNERALS

GERARD BREITENBECK, C.S.S.R.

For those who are left behind, the death of a loved one creates a number of immediate practical problems. Decisions must be made that are often far-reaching in their consequences. At the same time, the emotional shock connected with the loss of a loved one often makes it difficult to think calmly and clearly.

The plans and arrangements that must be made at such a time should be the consequence of intelligent understanding and deliberate reflection, rather than the result of haste, emotion and the pressure of circumstances. Because experience has

proved that families and individuals have not infrequently been unprepared, in the spirit of helpfulness the following practical information is presented on what to do and how to act when death strikes.

To many, the suggestions in this pamphlet may not seem very important at the present time. However, they have been carefully worked out by experts, and, if followed, may in the near or far distant future help greatly to avoid confusion and tragic mistakes, and to lighten the burden of sorrow.

## WHEN DEATH THREATENS

As soon as you know that a Catholic, or one who has shown any leaning toward the Catholic Church, is in danger of death, either from illness or accident, the priest should be immediately summoned so that he may administer the last sacraments. If the priest cannot arrive in time, or if the one who is dying is a non-Catholic in good faith, we should make with the person the acts of faith, hope, charity and contrition.

An unbaptized infant who is in danger of death should be baptized. So also should any adult who has not received baptism, but who expresses a desire to do so, or who indicated such a desire before lapsing into unconsciousness. These simple steps may mean the difference between the salvation and the loss of a soul.

Even after the sacraments have been administered, if the priest cannot remain until the moment of death, we should continue to say aloud the prayers for the dying and to whisper from time to time into the ear of the sick person short ejaculatory prayers and the act of contrition.

When the moment of death has come, the beliefs of the Catholic Faith do not remove from the human heart all feelings of sorrow and affliction. Neither do they forbid a reasonable display of grief. This grief will prove itself to be sincere when it is accompanied by true charity to the deceased person and to those whom he loved in life, who now need our help.

## GENERAL ARRANGEMENTS WITH THE FUNERAL DIRECTOR

1. When death occurs, the desired funeral director should be called without delay.

2. A reputable funeral director will know whether the coroner's services are needed. He will make all arrangements with the coroner should conditions demand his presence. It is well to remember the following principles:

a. Under certain conditions, such as sudden or accidental death, death from other than natural causes, death that comes to one who has not recently been under the care of a physician, the presence of a coroner may be legally necessary.

b. The coroner may, if he thinks necessary, demand a *post mortem*. If he does so, the family has no choice but to agree.

c. In some cases, the doctor may request a *post mortem*. The family is under



no obligation to consent to this. However, at times, by giving their consent they may advance the cause of medical knowledge and greatly benefit others who later on may be suffering from the same condition.

3. As far as possible, the family should provide the funeral director with accurate statistical information on the deceased. This information will become the basis of any newspaper articles or accounts that are obtained through the funeral director. It will also provide the proper data for filling out the death certificate. This death certificate is a most important document. For example, certified copies of the death certificate are required for settling insurance claims, receiving social security benefits, deciding questions about inheritance, and establishing the freedom of the partner to marry at a later date.

4. The person who is handling the funeral arrangements should be prepared to give the following information to the funeral director:

Full name of deceased  
Date and place of birth  
Occupation  
Place and length of residence  
Social Security number  
U. S. Armed Forces serial number  
Names of wife and children  
Names of brothers and sisters  
Name and place of birth of father  
Maiden name and place of birth of  
mother  
Time and place of funeral  
Time when funeral Mass is desired  
Date and place of interment

### **SPECIAL ARRANGEMENTS WITH THE FUNERAL DIRECTOR**

Almighty God has said: *Dust thou art and unto dust thou shalt return.* In the selection of the casket, this eternal truth should be taken into account. The only immortality that anyone can attain is im-

mortality of the soul. Regardless of how little or how much is spent for the care of the body, it will rise either glorious or hideous at the time of the General Resurrection, according as the soul left this life in the possession of God's grace or not.

A proper and decent preparation of the body for an honorable burial is fitting. However, the choice of a casket and arrangements for the funeral should not be so elaborate as to work hardship on, or impoverish the living. Not even the body of our Lord was so extravagantly treated when it was placed in the tomb.

The cost of funerals varies greatly according to the type of casket chosen and the number of services desired. The choice of these things should be geared to the actual financial condition of the family. The best course is to get a reputable funeral director and to discuss with him fully and frankly the financial details of the funeral.

A comprehensive knowledge of all the costs involved should be obtained before the final arrangements are completed, so

that later on there will be no misunderstanding. Ordinarily, the selection of the casket is made sometime after the body has been removed to the funeral parlor. This gives time for the emotions of sorrow to subside and for a reasonable choice to be made.

While it is often the family's desire, or the desire of the deceased, that clothing worn during life should be used, circumstances may make it more desirable to use burial garments which are designed to fit the body in a recumbent position.

Occasionally, particularly when there are no close relatives or when it will be very difficult for the survivors to handle matters, it is advisable for a person to make arrangements for his own funeral beforehand.

## BEFORE SEEING THE PRIEST

1. Prior to any visit to the rectory to arrange for a funeral, it is best to make an appointment by means of a phone

call. This will assure you that the priest will be in and available at a definite time.

2. If death occurs during the day, and no priest of the parish is actually present at the time, courtesy demands that the parish priest be notified of this fact by phone as soon as possible. It is certainly unbecoming that a parish priest should first learn of the death of one of his parishioners by reading about it in the obituary column of the newspaper.

3. If death occurs during the night and the deceased has already received all the sacraments, charity demands that the phone call to the rectory be postponed until a reasonable morning hour.

4. Once the priest has been notified by phone and an appointment made, all further arrangements for the funeral Mass, etc., should be made at the rectory. This should be done:

a. Either by some responsible person, or persons, in the family;

b. Or very often the funeral director will make the arrangements for the

church services with the priest, in the name of the family of the deceased.

### INFORMATION TO BE GIVEN TO THE PRIEST

Whoever goes to the rectory to make the arrangements for the funeral Mass and Christian burial, should be prepared to give the following information to the priest:

Full name of deceased

Place and length of residence

Date and place of birth

Name of husband or wife

Name and birthplace of father

Maiden name and birthplace of mother

When and where the person last received the sacraments

The date and time when the funeral Mass is desired

In which cemetery the burial will take place

The societies to which the person belonged

## THE RECTORY VISIT

According to the law of the Church, any person has the right to specify the church in which his funeral Mass is to be said. However, unless the person has himself specified another church, the funeral Mass should be offered in the parish church of the deceased. The relatives of the deceased person have no right to specify another church. The pastor, if he thinks it best, may grant permission for the funeral to be held in another church, but ordinarily it is becoming that those who ministered to the spiritual needs of the person during his life, should minister for him also at the time of death.

Those who arrange with the priest for the funeral services should make clear what type of Mass is desired. Funeral Masses are of three kinds: 1) Low Mass; 2) Requiem High Mass (sung Mass with one priest); 3) Solemn Requiem High Mass (sung Mass with three priests).

It is the right of the pastor to celebrate all the funeral Masses in his church. Therefore, do not ask any other priest,

even a relative, to say the funeral Mass without first consulting with the parish priest.

Where it is customary for the Rosary to be said by the priest during the wake, arrangements concerning the day and hour should be made with the priest.

## THE RIGHT OF CHRISTIAN BURIAL

One very sad and delicate duty which the pastor must at times perform is that of refusing Christian burial to certain persons. This is a very much misunderstood subject; so let us try to make it clear.

The Church cannot presume to pass judgment as to whether any person has saved or lost his soul. This is reserved to God, who alone can read the secrets of the mind and heart. All the Church can do is pass judgment upon the external life of an individual. In order to prevent scandal, the law of the Church forbids Christian burial to the following



categories of persons who died without giving signs of repentance:

1. Unbaptized persons, except infants who die in childbirth with their mother, and catechumens (those under instruction) who die unbaptized through no fault of their own.
2. Notorious apostates from the Christian Faith, or persons who notoriously belong to a heretical or schismatical sect, or to the Masons or other society of the same sort.
3. Those who died under excommunication or interdict pronounced by an ecclesiastical court.
4. Those who deliberately committed suicide.
5. Those who died in a duel, or from a wound received in a duel.
6. Those who left orders that their body be cremated.
7. All other public and manifest sinners; for instance, those who live in open

concubinage, or unlawful wedlock. (Canon 1239-1240)

Note that such persons are refused Christian burial only if they die without giving signs of repentance. Even a notorious gangster may be buried from the church, if before he died he called for the priest and received the last sacraments.

When the conditions are verified, the priest has no choice except to refuse Christian burial. Hence, the relatives, however badly they may feel, should not blame the priest. He is only doing his duty. If the case is at all doubtful, he will refer the matter to the bishop for final decision.

## THE WAKE

The wake has three specific functions:

- 1) It is a time of preparation in which arrangements are made for the funeral Mass and the interment of the body;
- 2) It enables the relatives to recover from the immediate shock of their be-

reavement; 3) It gives relatives and friends an opportunity to pay their respects to the dead and to comfort the family of the deceased with words and deeds of consolation. In the light of these purposes, the following suggestions are in place:

1. Those who come to a wake should not expect to be entertained as they might be on the occasion of an ordinary visit. Neither should they overpower the bereaved with excessive tears and prolonged words of sympathy.

2. A wake should not be made the occasion of prolonged drinking bouts.

3. When one steps up to the casket to view the remains, it is customary to kneel down and say a prayer for the repose of the departed soul.

### MASSES AND FLOWERS

Although the sending of flowers is a traditional expression of sympathy, this practice in no way approaches the value

of having the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass offered for the soul of the deceased. The Catholic Faith teaches that those who die in the grace of God, but without having done sufficient penance for their sins, must pass through a time of purification, which we call purgatory, before they are worthy to enter heaven. By the mercy of God, the living can, by the offering of Holy Mass, by prayers and good works, help to pay this debt of temporal punishment due to sin. Hence no word of criticism should be directed toward those who indicate their wish that floral tributes should be omitted in favor of more spiritually helpful expressions of sympathy, such as Masses, donations to charitable causes, etc.

In some dioceses and parishes, there are local regulations concerning the bringing of flowers into the church for the funeral service. The funeral director will usually be in a position to advise about such regulations. Similarly, certain cemeteries permit only a limited amount of flowers at the grave.

## CEMETERIES

One of the great rewards of a faithful Catholic life is burial in consecrated ground. During life, the body has been the temple of the Holy Spirit. In the final great Resurrection, it will rise glorious and resplendent to share with the soul in the everlasting happiness of heaven. Hence, it is fitting that it be laid to rest with due reverence in a place hallowed by the blessing of the Church.

The Catholic cemetery symbolizes the enduring hope that Christ our Lord, who is the Resurrection and the Life for all who believe in Him, will one day rejoin the bodies of the dead to their souls.

According to the law of the Church, every Catholic, unless excluded from Christian burial according to the rules mentioned above, should be buried in consecrated ground. No lot, therefore, should be purchased for the burial of a Catholic in any but a Catholic cemetery. In case a lot has previously been purchased in good faith, or if there is doubt as to whether a certain place of burial

is acceptable according to the laws of the Church, the matter should be cleared up before the time of death by approaching the local chancery office through the parish priest.

It is advisable for every family to acquire, previous to the death of any of its members, a burial plot sufficient for the prudently foreseen needs of the family. This will eliminate a hasty, and often ill-considered, purchase when one of the family suddenly dies. Moreover, it may often save considerable expense.

The priest who has the funeral Mass, or another priest of the parish, usually accompanies the body to the cemetery for the final rites. In some places, where the cemetery is a long distance away, at times arrangements can be made for a priest near the cemetery to conduct the ceremonies at the grave.

## AFTER THE FUNERAL

1. The days of the wake and the funeral are usually quite exhausting, particularly for elderly persons. Hence,

friends and relatives should see that the family of the deceased person have an opportunity to rest.

2. Sorrow for the loss of a loved one will be keenly felt for a considerable time. However, prolonged weeping and excessive manifestations of grief should be avoided. Christians must not sorrow, as St. Paul says, like those who have no hope.

3. Do not make rash investments or buy expensive memorials or run a give-away program of clothing and articles that belonged to the deceased until you have settled down.

4. Beware of so-called sympathy gimmicks received through the mail.

5. As regards the headstone or monument, be sure to deal only with established and reputable firms in your community. Be on your guard against phone calls from unknown agents. The amount of money spent upon the monument should conform with the financial condition of the family and not be dictated merely by an effort to outdo one's neigh-

bors. The form of the monument and the expressions engraved upon it should be in accordance with the doctrines of faith and with good taste.

6. If a wife is the survivor of her husband, she should call her lawyer and make a will to eliminate possible difficulties for the children concerning the family property in case anything happens to her.

7. The United States Government makes an allowance for the funeral and for a marker for each veteran. Detailed information can be procured at any Veterans Administration Office.

8. When a considerable number of Mass offerings have been left for the repose of the departed soul, it is often impossible to say all these Masses in the parish church. In this case, the Masses are usually sent to be said by Missionary Fathers.

9. The Mass schedule is often very crowded. Hence, arrangements for special Masses, such as anniversaries, should be made well in advance.



10. The law of the Church forbids the public announcement of Masses in cases where this might cause scandal, for instance, for the excommunicated, for non-Catholics, etc. However, Mass can be said privately for such persons.

### GENERAL INFORMATION

1. A sermon will or will not be given, in accord with the prescription of various dioceses. If a sermon is given, it cannot be merely a eulogy of the deceased person. The stipend for the funeral service is fixed by diocesan law and custom. Check with the parish as to the proper stipend in the place. The government and all courts of the land recognize the stipend as a legitimate item of the funeral expense. Hence, quite commonly the offering is made by the funeral director and included in the total bill.

2. It is both wise and just to pay the bills for the funeral expenses as soon as reasonably possible.

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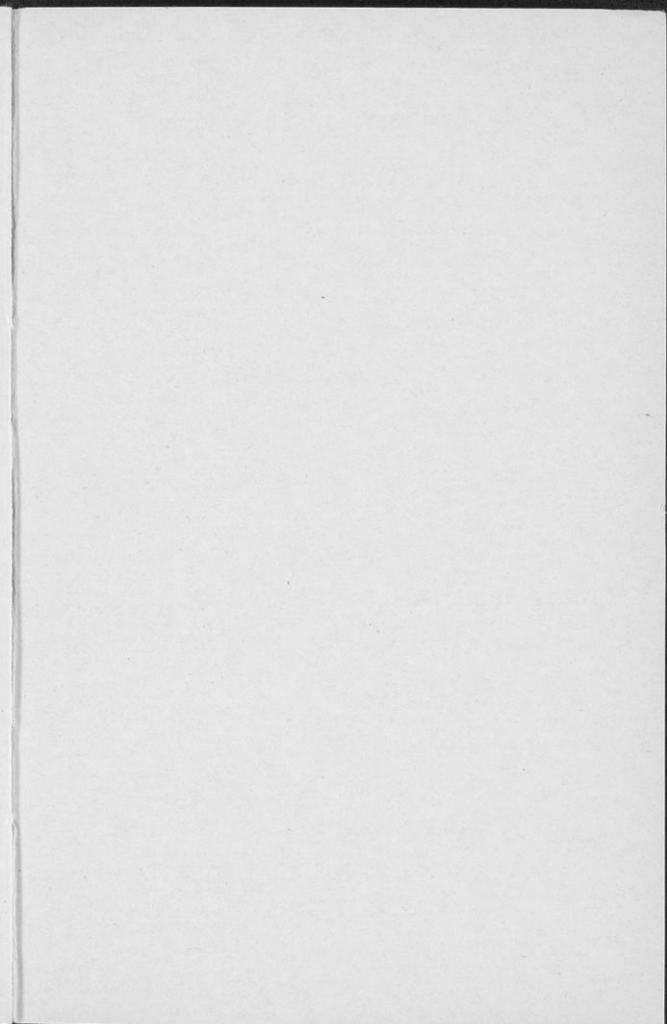
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