

Choosing Funeral Readings

This resource aims to help those preparing for a Catholic Funeral.

Funerals and the Word of God

A Catholic Funeral has three interrelated purposes:

- to proclaim the Death and Resurrection of Jesus through which we find salvation and hope;
- to pray for the deceased person that they will receive the mercy of God;
- to offer comfort and solace to those who mourn.

The Church in her liturgical books provides a selection of biblical passages for reading at a Funeral. These texts draw on all three of these aspects of a funeral. That is one of the reasons that the readings at a Funeral can be important as they offer to everyone a message of consolation and hope.

The Different Stages of a Funeral

In its fullest form a Catholic Funeral has three stages: the Vigil, the Funeral, the Committal. Not every funeral has all these stages and this can be dictated by a number of circumstances: the wishes of the deceased, local custom, practical arrangement. Each of the three stages will include readings from scripture but the amount can vary.

In the Vigil there is usually be 2 Readings (First Reading, Psalm, Gospel). In the shortest form of a Simple Reception at the Church there may be just a short reading from the Gospel.

Whether it is a Funeral Mass or a Funeral Service there can be either 2 or 3 readings (as shown below).

If the Committal follows after the Funeral there will just be a short verse from scripture said at the beginning. Where no other liturgy has taken place there can be a fuller Liturgy of the Word with 2 or 3 readings. If only one reading is desired it is usual for that to be chosen from the Gospel.

Choosing Readings for a Funeral

Whatever the form of service there will be readings from Scripture. Sometimes there might be just one but usually there will be either 2 or 3 passages and the Responsorial Psalm. The Church has already made a selection of suitable readings for weddings from the Gospels, and Old and New Testaments. These are found in the Lectionary, a 3-volume book which contains the given readings for Sundays, weekdays and other celebrations. The readings can also be found and downloaded from the Liturgy Office website.

The structure of the Liturgy of the Word is as follows:

3 Readings	2 Readings
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• First Reading <i>(from Old Testament. In Easter Season from the Acts of the Apostles or Book of Revelation)</i>• Responsorial Psalm• Second Reading <i>(from New Testament)</i>• Gospel Acclamation• Gospel	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• First Reading <i>(from Old or New Testament. In Easter Season from the Acts of the Apostles or Book of Revelation)</i>• Responsorial Psalm• Gospel Acclamation• Gospel

We are, perhaps, most familiar with the 3 Readings format from Sunday Mass but both are possible. The choice may depend on a number of factors: for example, there may be only 2 scripture passages which speak to you, you may have concerns about the length of the liturgy.

Resources

This may all sound a bit daunting but there are resources to help you. On the Liturgy Office website can be found:

- A list of all readings for the *Order of Christian Funerals*
- The texts of all readings for the *Order of Christian Funerals*

Ways of choosing your readings

There is not a single best way to choose what scripture passages to have. If possible, look at all the readings. But often with Funerals there is a pressure of time to get everything arranged. It is worth checking whether the deceased either left instructions or had any favourite passages of scripture. You may also find that friends and families have ideas and suggestions or that your Priest will guide you to consider certain texts.

Begin by looking at the selection of Gospel readings. These are often the more familiar passages taken from the story of Jesus.

Once a Gospel reading has been chosen consider the texts from the Old Testament. In the Lectionary (and in the list of readings on the website) there is a recommend Psalm to go with Old Testament reading.

In the Easter Season, the 50 days from Easter Sunday to Pentecost, it is usual for the First Reading to be taken from either the Acts of Apostles, which tells of the early days of the Church, or the Book of Revelation or Apocalypse, which offers a vision of heaven.

Your Priest will be able to advise and discuss with you your choices, and help you make the final decision about the readings.

What next?

Once the readings have been agreed your choices may be helpful when looking at music with the parish organist (etc.). They will also help with providing a musical setting of the psalm.

You will need to choose people to proclaim the readings in the liturgy. Make sure that whoever you choose will be able to proclaim them clearly with understanding. There is a resource on the Liturgy Website to assist with this. If you are not sure that anyone you know wishes to read this may be something which the parish can help with,

Frequently Asked Questions

Can I choose other scripture readings not given here?

Yes, this is possible and should be considered in conjunction with your Priest.

Can I replace one of the readings with a poem?

No, other readings may not take the place of scripture readings in the liturgy. However in discussion with your Priest you may find that the text might be used at another point in the liturgy, put in the Service booklet or read at the Reception etc.

Should we print the readings in the service booklet?

Best practice suggests that they should not be included as the readings in the liturgy are meant to be heard proclaimed rather than read-along with. However there may be circumstances where it might be considered, for example, if many of those attending do not have ease with spoken English or if similarly one of the readings is proclaimed in another language.

This is one of a series of Liturgy Office resources to support the *Order of Funerals*.
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