



Funerals at Saint James

The most important obligation we have to our deceased loved ones is to pray for them. There is no greater prayer than the Mass itself. The Church's Mass of Christian Burial (Funeral Mass) is offered for the repose of the soul of the deceased. By way of the Mass we are united with all the Christian faithful – here and in heaven – in commending the souls of the faithful departed to God.

The Church's liturgies also acknowledge God's goodness as lived out in the life of the deceased. Finally, they also bring consolation to those who mourn.

Below are the funeral policies of Saint James Parish. You are asked to read through this so that you are aware of them.

Contacting the Parish

Upon the death of a loved one, please contact the funeral home of your choice. Let them know that you wish to have a funeral Mass at Saint James. The funeral home will then reach out to us to secure a date.

The office will also arrange that the name of the deceased be added to our Sunday Mass petitions and to our parish prayer chain.

The Funeral Home

Make sure that the funeral home knows that you desire a funeral Mass for your loved one. Please note that the Mass cannot be offered at the funeral home but only here at the church.

The Wake

The Church's funeral ceremonies begin with the wake or vigil, which ideally takes place in the funeral home the night before the Funeral Mass. This is a blessed and informal time to celebrate the life of the deceased with favorite stories and to reconcile with the past. A priest can be available to offer the prayers of the Church at the wake.

The Funeral Mass (or The Mass of Christian Burial)

A priest from Saint James will assist the family in explaining the Mass and reading selections. The Director of Music will assist in choosing music.

The priest may offer explanations of the liturgy throughout the Mass for the benefit of visitors who might not be familiar with Catholic worship.

The Greeting

The priest greets the casket and the deceased's family in the vestibule (narthex). He sprinkles the casket with holy water, and the funeral pall is placed over it. The Introit is then chanted, or the hymn is sung as the mourners process into the church. When all are gathered, the priest prays the Collect (opening prayer) for the dead.

The Liturgy of the Word

This portion of the Mass consists of one or two readings from the Old and New Testament, a sung Responsorial Psalm, and the Gospel. The family may choose the scripture readings from approved texts found in the Order of Christian Funerals. After the Gospel, the celebrant or another priest or deacon delivers the homily. Then the General Intercessions are prayed.

The Liturgy of the Eucharist

While the chalice and paten are prepared, the Offertory Hymn or Meditation is sung. Then, the Preface and Eucharistic Prayer follow. The Sanctus, Memorial Acclamation and Agnus Dei are typically chanted.

To help guests avoid the awkwardness of not knowing what to do when some people go up to the altar rail to receive Holy Communion, the priest will remind all present of the ancient Christian tradition that only those in full communion with the Church who are in the state of grace and keeping the Eucharistic fast may receive Holy Communion. A reminder about this may also be printed in the program.

Final Commendation

At the end of Mass, we make a final farewell to the departed Christian. The ancient antiphon, "In Paradisum" (May the angels lead you to paradise), is chanted while the casket is blessed with holy water and then with incense. These serve as a reminder of Baptism and a sign of our prayers rising up to God.

Rite of Committal

The priest will either accompany the procession to the burial site or meet the mourners there.

Frequently Asked Questions

Q. When should we have the Funeral Mass?

- A. The Funeral Mass should be done as soon as possible, as waiting too long can add unnecessarily to one's stress.

Planning the Funeral Mass also means planning the burial, which needs to be done before the parish can confirm the Funeral Mass. If you are working with a funeral home, the funeral directors usually coordinate both with the cemetery and the church when you first sit down with them.

Sometimes there is a delay in the burial or families may have a special cemetery back home where everyone will gather in a few weeks or months. The wait for burials at Arlington National Cemetery can last half a year. Especially in these circumstances we find that there is great consolation to be found in having the Funeral Mass sooner rather than later.

Q. Should we have a funeral program?

- A. While a program is not absolutely necessary, it can be helpful for those unfamiliar with Catholic worship. A template of the program can be found [here](#).

Q. Can we livestream the Funeral Mass?

- A. No. Unfortunately, we have found that the vagaries of technology are such that we cannot guarantee livestreaming. We would rather not promise it than disappoint those who seek to rely on it.

Q. Can someone deliver a eulogy?

- A. Yes, but the Catholic Church does not permit eulogies at the Funeral Mass. Eulogies per se only happen at the wake, burial, or reception.

However, brief remarks by a family member or friend can be offered in the church at the beginning of the rituals before the Funeral Mass. So that nobody misses this part of the Funeral, these remarks would start at the published time for the Funeral Mass. If you are working with a Funeral Home and/or have a scheduled time to reach the cemetery, please be sure to factor into the schedule that the Funeral Mass might conclude late than expected.

The focus of every Christian homily is the Paschal Mystery: the Death and Resurrection of Our Savior Jesus Christ, especially so at a Funeral. It goes without saying that the homilist would be happy to incorporate details about the

life of your loved one into the homily. Please be sure to convey these by email to the priest who will be offering the Funeral Mass.

Q. May we invite another priest from outside the diocese to participate in the Funeral Mass?

- A. Yes. One of our parish priests would be the main celebrant of the Funeral Mass, but the assistance of other priests is welcome. Please ask them to contact the main celebrant directly to coordinate their collaboration.

With permission of the Pastor, a visiting priest may be the main celebrant of the funeral Mass.

All priests from outside the diocese are required to present a letter of good standing to our parish office and the diocesan Clergy Office. Your priest will be familiar with the process.

Q. May we do the readings at Mass?

- A. Yes. A family member or friend may do one or two of the readings (except for the Responsorial Psalm and the Gospel). This person should be someone who already serves as a reader at Mass and lives a life consistent with Catholic teaching. Because doing the readings is an official role in Catholic liturgy, the reader needs to be a practicing Catholic. Given the understandable difficulty that family members may have maintaining their composure at the funeral, the parish is very happy to provide a reader.

Q. Which readings do we use?

- A. Please make your selection from the list of options which are approved for the Rites of Christian Burial. The priest will provide a book of appropriate and approved readings, which can also be found [here](#).

Q. Who composes the Prayers of the Faithful?

- A. It is the priest's responsibility to compose the Prayers of the Faithful. You may suggest some intentions for him to incorporate into the prayers (for example, the names of family members who are too ill to be present at the Funeral Mass and/or also those loved ones who have already passed away).

Q. May we have an offertory procession?

- A. Yes. Please note that those who bring up the bread and wine should be modestly and reverently dressed. There is no requirement that they be Catholics.

Q. How do we arrange for music?

- A. Our parish Director of Music, Mr. Don Carolina, will help you plan the sacred music. He can be reached at dcarolina@stjamescatholic.org and 703-532-8815 x225.

The musical selections for the Mass should be drawn from our [parish's approved list](#).

Q. May we invite musicians and singers from outside the parish to participate in the Funeral Mass?

- A. Possibly. Please contact our Director of Music, so that he may ensure their suitability and prepare them for their participation in the Funeral Mass.

Q. What about flowers?

- A. Flowers are welcome in church except during Advent and Lent. Flowers placed in the sanctuary are used in the worship of God and, therefore, would remain in the sanctuary after the Mass is concluded. At any time of year an arrangement or two might be placed in the Church lobby as a decoration; these may return home or be brought to the cemetery.

Q. What about cremation?

- A. Given the sometimes-exorbitant cost of funerals, this is a common question and it is understandable that some families feel that they have no choice but to opt for cremation.

The Church prohibits cremation absolutely when it signifies a lack of belief in the resurrection of the body. Otherwise, cremation is permitted. The remains, contained inside a worthy urn or box, may be present at the funeral. We have a small table for them in the sanctuary. There may also be flowers on that table but not pictures. We can set up a table in the vestibule to display photographs.

The Church still prefers that the body not be cremated and urges that, if cremation occurs, it be done after the funeral. Your funeral home should be able to accommodate this request without incurring the cost of a casket.

When the body is cremated, the Church requires that the ashes be laid to rest in a sacred place: that is, that the urn be interred in a grave, buried at sea, or entombed in a mausoleum or columbarium. It is not permitted to scatter the ashes or to keep them in a private home. Saint James Parish will provide the funeral rites when there are plans for a burial or interment of the ashes.

Please know that if there are no plans or arrangements for the proper disposition of the ashes, then we cannot have the funeral at Saint James.

Q. Will the priest come to the burial?

A. Interment usually follows immediately after the funeral Mass. In those cases, the priest will accompany the family to the cemetery for the funeral rites at the grave. If the burial is set for a later date, our priests would be happy to accompany you to the cemetery then. Please make arrangements through the parish office to ensure that all the dates are on everyone's calendars.

Q. How else can we prepare for the funeral Mass?

A. The Mass is the highest form of prayer, because it is the prayer of Christ Himself to the Father. Our private prayers dispose us to participate in and receive the graces of the Mass. They are also a great help for our deceased loved ones. Here are some suggested prayers for family members and friends between now and the Funeral Mass.

The [Holy Rosary](#) makes for a lovely family prayer. It allows you to take turns leading and following. It assists you in joining your sorrows and joys with the life of Christ.

The [Chaplet of Divine Mercy](#) draws us into a simple meditation on Our Lord's Passion and into prayer for all those who need His mercy.

[Eucharistic Adoration](#) is a way to spend quiet and peaceful time before our Lord.

Lastly, this is an important time to make a good [Confession](#). The Sacrament of Penance is offered on Wednesday and Thursday evenings, Friday mornings, Saturday afternoon and evenings. Our priests are also available any other time that fits your schedule.

Q. Are there costs involved to have a funeral at St. James?

A. Yes and no.

Some funeral homes will include the parish's fees in your contract. Some funeral homes require that you pay the church separately. In that case, the costs are:

For the Parish: \$150 cash or check made payable to St. James Catholic Church

For the priest: \$150 cash or check made payable to the priest celebrating the Mass.

For the cantor: \$200 cash or check made payable to the “cantor.” The Director of Music will provide you with the name of the person.

For the Director of Music: \$250 cash or check made payable to Don Carolina.

\$25 cash for each altar server

NOTE: No family will be denied a funeral due to inability to pay.