

**Pastoral Guidelines for Eulogies within the
Archdiocese of Saint Paul and Minneapolis**

March, 2014

“In the face of death, the Church confidently proclaims that God has created each person for eternal life and that Jesus, the Son of God, by his death and resurrection, has broken the chains of sin and death that bound humanity.... The Church’s liturgical and sacramental life and proclamation of the Gospel make this mystery present in the life of the faithful....

At the death of a Christian, whose life of faith was begun in the waters of baptism and strengthened at the Eucharistic table, the Church intercedes on behalf of the deceased person because of its confident belief that death is not the end nor does it break the bonds forged in life... The Church through its funeral rites commends the dead to God’s merciful love and pleads for the forgiveness of their sins.”

-Order of Christian Funerals, General Introduction, Paragraphs 1, 4, 6

The ministry offered by the Church to a grieving spouse, child, or parent, is one of her most important tasks. To give comfort to those who mourn is also a most powerful means of evangelization, and can oftentimes serve as a welcome and effective reminder to those who have left the practice of the faith that a spiritual home waits to receive them again.

But in the midst of our critical ministry to the grieving, the Church must never lose sight of the fundamental and primary obligation she has to pray for the deceased. A belief in the efficacy of prayers for the dead has been with the Church since her earliest years, and it must be remembered that praying for the dead is no less a spiritual work of mercy than comforting the afflicted and those who mourn.

Because of this pressing need to pray for the dead, and the duty to remind those who mourn also of this need, the Church explicitly forbids “eulogies” within the homily of the Funeral Liturgy (paragraph 27), even as the Church also allows for words of remembrance to be offered by a family member or friend of the deceased prior to the final commendation (paragraph 170). Here the Church makes a distinction that is important, if subtle. A eulogy, strictly considered, is “good words” on behalf of the

decedent, a speech of praise regarding the one who has died. Words of remembrance, however, do not seek to canonize the decedent, but should ideally be an attempt to highlight the life of faith and works of love that marked the one who has passed on, especially as they were experienced by a family member or friend.

But even as the Church explicitly allows for words of remembrance to be offered by a family member or friend prior to the final commendation, experience shows that this opportunity is not always used well, and can at times unfortunately interrupt the tone set by the prayers of the Church. What is more, the spoken statements of individuals within the funeral liturgy carry a sense of ecclesiastical approval and at times are understood by the assembly to be authentic Catholic teaching, or at the very least approved by the pastor and community. Accordingly, great care must be taken to make those who wish to speak words of remembrance aware of Catholic teaching on death and the after-life, so as to avoid theologically problematic statements being made in the liturgy.

In order to respect both the Church's willingness to invite family members or friends to speak words of remembrance on behalf of the decedent as well as the Church's clear desire to keep the focus of the Funeral Liturgy upon Jesus Christ and His Paschal Mystery, the following norms are to be followed within the Archdiocese of Saint Paul and Minneapolis.

1. Words of remembrance, if they are insisted upon by the family or friends of the deceased, are ordinarily to be delivered at the wake, the burial of the deceased, or at another gathering of family and friends outside of the Funeral Liturgy itself.
2. At the pastor's discretion, such words might also be delivered immediately prior to the start of the Funeral Mass, that is, immediately prior to the greeting.
3. At times, the pastor may also determine that it is pastorally appropriate or preferable that the words of remembrance be made just prior to the Final Commendation. In these cases, it is recommended that only one speaker be arranged, and that the text to be read at the service be reviewed by the pastor or his delegate. This text should be no longer than one-page.
4. In the cases of funerals for clergy, words of remembrance are not to take place prior to the final commendation.