

Diocesan Policies Regarding Eulogies

The funeral liturgy is first and foremost an act of praise and thanksgiving for Christ's victory over sin and death, a proclamation of the paschal mystery. This act of worship belongs to the whole community, to the whole church, and not to any individual or group. Any elements that do not give expression to this act of worship are not acceptable.

In every celebration for the dead, the Church attaches great importance to the reading of the Word of God. The biblical texts proclaim the story of God's love and fidelity, reminding us of God's design for the world in which suffering and death will relinquish their hold on all whom God has called his own. I want to stress that a careful selection and use of readings from Scripture will provide the family and the community with an opportunity to hear God speak to them in their needs, sorrows, fears and hopes.

The homily should have a narrative style. At a funeral, there is storytelling to be done – a real person's story – not on its own, but in relation to God. The norm is clearly spelled out in the introduction to the *Order of Christian Funerals*.

"A brief homily based on the readings is always given after the gospel reading at the funeral liturgy and may also be given after the readings of the vigil service; but there is never a eulogy. Attentive to the grief of those present, the homilist should also help the members of the assembly to understand the mystery of God's love and they mystery of Jesus' victorious death and resurrection were present in the life and death of the deceased and that these mysteries are active in their lives as well. Through the homily, members of the family and community should receive consolation and strength to face the death of one of their members with a hope nourished by the saving word of God. " (27)

A eulogy is a certain kind of rhetoric or public speaking, focussed on the deceased person, with the intention of praising him or her. In this set oration there may be an implication that the praise is exaggerated or even untrue.

A homily, on the other hand, is to be a discourse within the context of a worship service which invites the assembly to consider and interpret its life and experience in light of a biblical text or texts which have been proclaimed.

What is at issue in the question of preaching at a funeral is clearly not that any mention of the person who has died or of the person's attributes and accomplishments be avoided by the homilist. Rather, it is that such references be consistent with the spirit of the liturgy and find a proper context within the homily.

At the funeral of a Christian, the homily should be genuinely Eucharistic, a statement of praise and thanks to God. It should invite the person's family and friends to simultaneously hold on the values and lessons of this person's life, entrust the person's final destiny into the hands of God, and remember the shortness and fragility of human life and God's invitation in Christ to live every moment fully and abundantly.

A eulogy should be given in another context. There are three approved contexts for a eulogy or "*words of remembrance*."

1. *The Order of Christian Funerals* suggests the vigil of the deceased. "*After the prayer of intercession and before the blessing or at some other suitable time during the vigil, a member of the family or a friend of the deceased may speak in remembrance of the deceased.*"

2. At the grave-site or the funeral reception after the interment.

3. In the Church prior to the liturgy, *i.e.*, prior to reception of the body at the entrance to the Church. Under no circumstances at the funeral Mass, not even just before the Final commendation, is a eulogy or "*words of remembrance*" to be given.

March 5, 2003

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