

THE EUCHARIST AT THE FUNERAL

Funeral with a Eucharist

While some will not want a eucharist during the actual funeral, others will find it helpful.

A eucharist does however raise the question of whether or not members of other churches will be able to receive communion.

It is doubtful if a Roman Catholic bishop would permit open communion, and though some priests would take the responsibility on themselves, others would insist on episcopal permission.

Having a celebration of the eucharist could mean that bereaved people would be asking permission to receive communion in a Roman Catholic church at a time when they are very vulnerable, and when a refusal would be devastating.

The present position as stated in the *Directory for the Application of Principles and Norms on Ecumenism* (1993) is that, where norms are established for judging situations of grave and pressing need (by the *Directory* itself, by the diocesan bishop, or by the Episcopal Conference), then

131. The conditions under which a Catholic minister may administer the sacrament of the Eucharist ... to a baptised person ... are that the person be unable to have recourse for the sacrament desired to a minister of his or her own Church or ecclesial Community, ask for the sacrament of his or her own initiative, manifest Catholic faith in this sacrament and be properly disposed.

The teaching document *One Bread One Body*, produced by the three Catholic Bishops' Conferences of England and Wales, Ireland, and Scotland, published in 1998, presents general norms on sacramental sharing between [Roman] Catholics and other Christians. Paragraph 109 discusses what constitutes a "unique occasion" in the life of a family or individual for which admission to Holy Communion in the Roman Catholic Church may be allowed. Paragraphs 110-111 deal with the possible admission to Communion of both bride and groom during a marriage ceremony where one partner is not a member of the Roman Catholic Church. Paragraph 112 lists other "unique occasions for joy or sorrow" when people might ask for admission to Communion, including "the immediate family of the deceased at a Funeral Mass", adding: "Each situation will be judged individually according to the norms."*

Individual dioceses in various parts of the world have issued their own specific statements about participation in funerals. Two of these, which are of particular interest, are quoted below.

On Advent Sunday 1999 the Diocese of Rockville Centre, New York state, USA, issued norms (revised and reissued 1 October 2000) for "Special circumstances for the admission of other Christians to communion at Catholic celebrations of the Eucharist" in the diocese. In a section covering sacramental sharing with Episcopal (a footnote indicates that "this also refers to members of the Anglican Communion throughout the world") and Protestant Christians, there is specific mention of "Catholic Funeral Mass":

"Another example of a pastoral situation that might constitute a case of 'grave necessity' and therefore qualify as an exceptional circumstance is the funeral Mass. At a funeral, a Christian spouse, family member, relative or friend of a deceased Catholic might, in keeping with canon 844,4, ask to receive the Eucharist so as to participate more fully in the funeral Mass to unite more closely with the family of the deceased and to derive spiritual strength and grace at a time of great sorrow.

*This paragraph is quoted in the leaflet prepared for the National Board of Catholic Women by its Ecumenical Standing Committee, *May my husband (a Christian of another Church) ever receive Holy Communion with me? How?* (2000)



'You live in your marriage the hopes and difficulties of the path to Christian Unity.' *Pope John Paul II, York, 1982*

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The principles and norms of canon law and the *Directory* can be applied by priests, deacons and pastoral ministers in particular cases for individuals who request Eucharist on the occasion of funerals. ... Because of the complexity of conditions, it is permitted neither to offer a general invitation to all people at the funeral Mass to share in the Eucharist, nor to forbid them by public announcement.

When all five conditions of canon 844,4 are met, the pastor may give another Christian permission to receive Holy Communion at the funeral liturgy.”

In 2001 the Australian Diocese of Maitland-Newcastle, New South Wales, issued *Real Yet Imperfect: Pastoral Guidelines for Sacramental Sharing*, a condensed version of *Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations within the Catholic Diocese of Maitland-Newcastle*. The section *Eucharistic Celebrations* includes this statement:

“Communicant members of other Christian traditions who manifest Catholic belief in the Eucharist, and who wish to receive the Eucharist, may do so on certain occasions by way of exception, and provided the conditions set out above are met.” [These conditions are as #131 of the *Directory*, quoted above.] “Such occasions for individual decision-making may include ... Funeral Masses ...”

In the section *Interchurch Marriages* there is specific mention of Funerals:

“Deceased members of interchurch families may be buried with Catholic rites, especially in the case of a deceased spouse. Deceased Catholics may in turn be buried using the rites of another Christian denomination should there be a justifying reason to do so.”

If a Roman Catholic priest is willing to offer a blessing to members of other churches attending a funeral Mass, it is important that a clear invitation to come to receive a blessing should be given during the service. A blessing can also be offered if a eucharistic service is held in a church of another Christian community and Roman Catholics are present.

Funeral without a Eucharist

It should be noted that the Roman Catholic Church in England and Wales, and in Scotland, provides two forms of the funeral Liturgy: *Funeral Mass* and *Funeral Liturgy outside Mass*. Both can be found in *An Order of Christian Funerals* (Geoffrey Chapman, 1991), prepared by the Liturgy Office of the Bishops’ Conference of England and Wales and the International Commission on English in the Liturgy (a Joint Commission of Catholic Bishops’ Conferences), and authorised by the Episcopal Conferences of England and Wales and of Scotland. Provision is also made for two forms of funeral liturgy for children.

The *Funeral Liturgy outside Mass* may be used (1) when the funeral Mass is not permitted (on solemnities of obligation, Holy Thursday and the Easter Triduum, and Sundays of Advent, Lent and the Easter season); (2) when it is not possible to celebrate the funeral Mass before the committal (for example, if a priest is not available); (3) for pastoral reasons. It can if wished include a distribution of Holy Communion.

In all these liturgies there is a choice of prayers within each part of the service.