

APPLYING AND ADAPTING THE REFORMED FUNERAL RITES

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We have to get ready for the introduction of the reformed funeral rites. They are the fruit of long and serious work of experts and pastors from all over the world, because the draft of the new funeral ritual had been offered for experimentation on May 16, 1967, also to the bishops and priests of the Philippines. It is sad to note, however, that some bishops did not inform their priests of what was offered them, while in other cases the priests themselves were slow to study the papers and make use of them. The general reaction was that the rite was too long and complicated — an indication that it had not yet been studied when this judgment was made. Only few reports on the results of experiments reached the National Liturgical Commission (cf. *Lit. Inform. Bulletin of the Philippines*, March 1968, pp. 26-28).

It would be wrong, however, to simply shy away from a look at the new ritual because it has to be used soon. Nobody expects the busy parish priest to work through the 90 pages of the Latin original (*Ordo Exsequiarum, Typis polyglottis Vaticanis*, 1969, 91 pp.). But some attempts should be made to get acquainted with those rites.

From among the three types of funeral celebrations in the reformed ritual we select here the first which, in its full form provides for three stations: the first in the home of the deceased, the second in the church and the third in the cemetery. To be added to this form are two intervening processions so that the whole rite comprises the station in the home of the deceased, a procession from there to the church, the station in the church, a procession from the church to the cemetery and a last

station at the grave. The two published reports on experiments in the Philippines obviously preferred this first type of funeral celebrations.

Immediately the objection will be raised that because of the limited number of clergy in this country and the great distances from the church to the cemetery in many places, this rite, at least in its full form, cannot be applied.

In view of preceding experimentations these objections have been found to be true. The new ritual takes them into consideration and allows the eventual omission of both the liturgical rite in the home of the deceased and also the rite in the cemetery. Of the long and somewhat complicated ritual for the first type of funeral services there remains then only the station in the church. The ritual however, grants the permission to the faithful — it even exhorts them — to recite the prayers of the first and the third station in the absence of a priest or deacon.

How, then, is this rite to be performed in the one remaining station, in the church? Ideally, the Mass should be the central part of this celebration. But the number of priests is small and that of the funerals great. Hence, the celebration of the Mass may be substituted by a Liturgy of the Word which is to be followed by the rite that was formerly called "responso" in this country, whose name in the future will be "final commendation and farewell".

Particularly in rural areas parish priests may still raise the objection that "in the station in the church, without Mass, the Liturgy of the Word... tends to distract the people because of the length, and because of the parts that have less meaning for them" (*Lit. Inform. Bulletin*, March 1968, p. 28). As a result of experiments also in this country the wish had been expressed and directed to Rome that the Liturgy of the Word "when there is no Mass, be replaced by a simple Bible Service, e. g., one Scripture reading, a short homily, and the Prayers of the Faithful" (*Ibid*). Rome granted these petitions: the possibility of a Bible Service, with but one reading was inserted as an optional adaptation in the reformed funeral ritual.

In view of this concession and for the benefit of those concerned we offer here the texts and rites of such a funeral service, consisting of one single station in the church, comprising a simple Bible Service, a short

homily, the prayer of the faithful and the "final commendation and farewell." Before we present this rite, a few words are to be added on this "final commendation and farewell."

Before the body is taken away, the Christian community salutes its member for a last time and commends him to God. In Baptism he had been made a member of the Mystical Body of Christ, the community of faithful. This is the reason why the reformed rite of infant Baptism urges that a community of Christians as representatives of the Church, be present for the reception of a new member of the Church in Baptism.

Similarly, in a last farewell, the same community salutes its member in a special rite in the funeral celebration. Baptism and the Christian funeral are illustrations of the psalm verse that is found in many funeral rituals: "The Lord will guard your *going-out* and your *coming-in*, now and forever" (Ps 121 (120), 8).

Fittingly connected with this farewell in Christ is the sprinkling with holy water which recalls Baptism; it is a reminder that in Baptism the Christian got his direction to eternal life. It is equally a reminder that because of Baptism, despite the separation that death always means, there remain communion and unity. We are today very much aware of the bonds which link the whole Mystical Body of Christ (cf. Vatican II, Const. on the Church, art. 50). In the last analysis we shall never be completely separated from one another in death. We say "Farewell in the Lord" in the hope of eternal life, in the hope of meeting one another again.¹

FUNERAL RITE

1. Reception at the church door

The priest, vested in surplice and stole (or also with a cope), goes to the entrance of the church and there greets the people accompanying the funeral cortege, especially the members of the family of the deceased, with a few sympathetic words. He may offer them the consolation of faith, using words from

¹ On the foregoing cf. NOTITIAE 2 (1966) 353-363; 5 (1969) 431-435.

Sacred Scripture (optional)

Mt 11,28: The Lord says: Come to me, all you who are tired from carrying your heavy loads, and I will give you rest.

Sir 2,6: Trust in the Lord, and he will help you; follow a straight path and hope for him. Fear the Lord and wait for his mercy.

2 Cor 1,3-4: Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the merciful Father and the God of all consolation. He comforts us in all our afflictions.

He may then sprinkle the coffin with holy water and say (if he so wishes) the following

Prayer (optional)

Priest: The Lord be with you.

All: And also with you.

Priest: Let us pray.

Lord, listen to our prayers as we plead for your mercy on the soul of your servant N., whom you have summoned to leave this mortal life. Set him in a place of peace and light, and make him one in the company of peace and light, and make him one in the company of your saints. This we ask through Christ our Lord (33).²

All: Amen.

2. Entrance into the church

While the funeral procession enters the church an entrance song is sung, which follows the rules laid down for these songs in the general guidelines for the Introit of the Roman Missal.

The place of the coffin in the church may be adorned with some candles. One may also place the Easter Candle near the head of the deceased. One may also put on the coffin a crucifix, a copy of the Gospels or a volume of Sacred Scripture.

² The numbers in parentheses indicate the numbers of prayers and rites in the Roman funeral ritual. This is a private translation, not an official one.

The priest goes to his seat. In the usual way there begins the celebration.

3. Liturgy of the Word

Priest: In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.
All: Amen.

Priest: The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

All: And also with you.

The priest may also use one of the other usual greetings. If the priest does not prefer to address the community in a short admonition, he says the following prayer:

Let us pray.

God, all things that die live in you. Through you our bodies do not perish by death; they are gloriously changed. We ask you to command that the soul of your servant N. may be carried into the company of your friend, the patriarch Abraham, to be raised up again at the last day of the great judgment. By your love absolve him from every fault that he has committed during his life on earth. This we ask you through Christ our Lord (174).

All: Amen.

In the subsequent liturgy of the word one may read three lessons, of which the first should be from the Old Testament and last one from the gospels. But pastoral reasons may eventually suggest only one reading, to be freely chosen from among those offered in the appendix of the ritual, e.g.

Dan 12, 1-3: Those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake.

1 Jn 3,1-2 : We shall see him as he is.

Jn 6,37-40 : Every one who believes in the Son should have eternal life and I will raise him up at the last day.

Jn 14, 1-6 : There are many rooms in my Father's house.²

² There are 42 lessons from Sacred Scripture for these occasions in the funeral ritual: 7 from the Old Testament, 18 from the New Testament and 17 from the Epistles.

After the reading a short homily is to be given, but without any kind of funeral eulogy.

1. Prayer of the Faithful

Priest: Let us pray with confidence to God, the almighty Father, who raised Christ his Son from the dead, for the salvation of the living and the dead.

Leader: That N., given the seed of immortal life in baptism, may be granted eternal fellowship with the saints, let us pray to the lord.

ALL: Lord, graciously hear us.⁴

Leader: That N., whose food was the body of Christ, the bread of eternal life, may be raised up on the last day, let us pray to the Lord.

ALL: Lord, graciously hear us.

Leader: That God reward our deceased brethren, relatives and benefactors for the work they have done, let us pray to the Lord.

ALL: Lord, graciously hear us.

Leader: That God may welcome into the light of his presence all who have died in the hope of the resurrection, let us pray to the Lord.

ALL: Lord, graciously hear us.

Leader: That God may gather into his glorious kingdom all of us, assembled here in faith and devotion, let us pray to the Lord.

ALL: Lord, graciously hear us.

Priest: Lord, may the prayer of this congregation that humbly implores you, avail the souls of your deceased servants. Forgive them all their sins; make them share in the redemption you have procured for them. This we ask you through Christ our Lord (200).

ALL: Amen.

⁴One may freely take any of the approved invocations instead.

Instead of this concluding prayer, the priest may introduce the Lord's Prayer to be said by all present:

Priest: Let us now pray in the words our Lord Jesus Christ gave us:

ALL: Our Father...

5. Final Commendation and Farewell

Accompanied by servers with holy water and incense, the priest takes his place near the bier, facing the people. First he pronounces an invitation, with these, or similar words:

Priest: As is the custom of believers,
 we bring the human body to burial.
 To God all things are bound.
 Let us pray that he will raise again
 this body of our brother (sister),
 which we must bury in its imperfection,
 to the perfection and condition of the saints:
 and that he will summon his (her) soul
 to take its place with the saints and believers.
 May God grant him (her) mercy when he (she) is judged.
 May he (she) be redeemed from death and forgiven his (her)
 sins.
 May he (she) be at peace with the Father,
 and brought home on the shoulder of the Good Shepherd.
 My he (she) deserve everlasting joy,
 and the companionship of the saints
 in the court of the eternal king (46).

Now all pray in silence for a short while.

The bishops' conference may decree that, according to local customs, after the silence for personal prayer, words of greeting be added by the relatives of the deceased.

Then the body is sprinkled with holy water and incensed, which may be done also after the chant of farewell.

(Subvenite) Come to his aid, you saints of God; hasten to meet him, you angels of the Lord. *Take his soul and offer it in the sight of the Most High.

Y May Christ who called you, take you to himself; may angels escort you to Abraham's side. *Take his soul and offer it in the sight of the Most High.

R' Lord, grant that he may have eternal rest forever in the radiance of your light. *Take his soul and offer it in the sight of the Most High.

Other responsories may be sung, e.g., "Rogamus te", or: "Antequam nascerer", or: "Credo quod Redemptor meus vivit", or: "Qui Lazarum resuscitasti", or: "Libera me, Domine, de viis inferi", or any other suitable chant.

If there is no possibility to have a chant, all present should at least pray in common for the deceased, in some invocations like the following (cf. 187):

Priest: You shed your blood for N. We ask you: grant that he (she) may have eternal rest.

ALL: In the radiance of your light.

Priest: Before his (her) birth, O Lord, you knew him (her), and made him (her) in your image. We ask you: grant that he (she) may have eternal rest.

ALL: In the radiance of your light.

Priest: To you, O Lord, he (she) gave back his (her) soul. We ask you: grant that he (she) may have eternal rest.

ALL: In the radiance of your light.

Priest: He (she) was sorry for the sins he (she) has committed against you. We ask you: grant that he (she) may have eternal rest.

ALL: In the radiance of your light.

Priest: You destined him (her) to be raised up from the dead and see you, God, his (her) savior. We ask you: grant that he (she) may have eternal rest.

ALL: In the radiance of your light.

After the responsory or communal invocations the priest says the following prayer of final commendation.

Priest: Most merciful Father,
 into your hands we commend the soul of our brother (sister),
 for we are sustained by the sure hope
 that he (she) will rise again on the last day
 with all those who have died in Christ.
 (We give you thanks
 for all the good things you heaped upon your servant
 in this mortal life
 as signs for us of your goodness
 and of the communion of saints in Christ.)³
 Lord, in your great pity accept our prayer
 that the gates of paradise may be opened for your servant.
 And in our turn,
 may we too be comforted by the words of faith
 (until we hasten to meet Christ
 when we may all be for ever with the Lord
 and with our brother.)³
 This we ask you through Christ our Lord (48).

ALL: Amen.

6. Conclusion

The priest concludes the ceremony with the words:

Priest: Lord, grant that he (she) may have eternal rest

ALL: In the radiance of your light.

While the body is taken away, the following (or any other suitable chant) may be sung:

(In paradisum) May the angels lead you into paradise. Martyrs await your coming and escort you to Jerusalem, the holy city.

Or:

The choir of angels welcome you, and with Lazarus who once was poor, may you enjoy eternal rest.

³The parts in parentheses may be left out.