Opinion
News



by NCR Staff

View Author Profile

Join the Conversation

Send your thoughts to *Letters to the Editor*. Learn more

December 20, 2019
Share on BlueskyShare on FacebookShare on TwitterEmail to a friendPrint

Last week, NCR posted a piece by Don Clemmer on the role of eulogies at Catholic funerals in the Chicago Archdiocese. The revised guidelines were released by Chicago Cardinal Blase Cupich in November. The Chicago document doesn't exactly break new ground in its recommendations, but it does put heavy stipulations on how a eulogy can be given. Letters are edited for length and clarity.

As a strong supporter of Chicago Cardinal Blase Cupich, it is with some hesitation that I comment on his diocese's guidelines on Catholic funerals.

Two years ago, my wife of 57 years passed away after battling lung cancer. A forward thinking, cradle Catholic, she spent her last weeks in hospice preparing for her final journey. She selected the presider for her service, the readings and the music. She also had made a decision to donate her body to medicine. Her cremains are still at that medical school. There was no casket or urn at her celebration of life. Attendees left that "celebration" feeling grateful for 78 years of a life well-lived.



These guidelines appear to me to have been written for protection against a "worst case scenario." I believe it is time for our church to rethink centuries old attitudes and customs about our joining our heavenly father. Death cannot be a surprise. This is what we are all destined for. This is the sacred time when we go to a better place. I believe that this event should be celebrated, and that caskets, black vestments, and a somber environment may not always be the best solution. Can we not believe that our loved one is being raised to eternal life?

STAN FITZGERALD

San Jose, California

***

Another example and, sadly, an opportunity for clericalism.

As a participating, practicing Catholic I have observed the blessings, and missed opportunities of the funeral process.

I've lost loved ones. I've been involved in the bereavement ministry. I shared with friends and acquaintances their loss.

As long as love and respect are being shown by all — namely, clergy, funeral professionals, family and friends — nothing should be prohibited. Each birth is different. Each life is different. Each death and loss are different.

As a lay "practicing" Catholic, I think the only mandate should be on the priest or deacon to show love and compassion as Jesus does. Please remind us we are all going to him and while sad, it is good, very good!

ELIZABETH FOSTER

Princeton, New Jersey

***

This priest's response to grieving families precisely incarnates the stony heartedness and deafness of the celibate male priesthood.

Of course, we are people of the resurrection, and that is our sure and certain hope.

But the funeral is the time to hold the tension of Mary sitting at the foot of the cross as her loved one's body is laid into her arms, and the anguished waves of grieving, shock and denial tear her apart, leaving her abandoned in a story devoid of meaning. Can you not stay one moment in my pain? This is what needs to be preached.

Only an insensitive fool would run from the pain at the foot of the cross and fix it with the glory of resurrection.

DONNA ZUROWESTE

St. Louis, Missouri

***

I have been a pastor for nearly 20 years and have presided at dozens of funerals. My experience tells me that one or two family members should be permitted to offer a brief eulogy, or "words of remembrance," at the funeral of their loved one, but that this should be done at the beginning of the service (I suggest after the entrance procession and before the opening prayer), rather than at the end of the service before the final commendation. Offering these words at the beginning of the service serves the legitimate pastoral interest of allowing grieving family members to speak of their deceased loved one in the context of the community's prayer.

Thereafter, the funeral liturgy, which is designed to remind those present that death is not the final word and that the dead will be raised, can proceed in an unbroken spirit of hopefulness. If offered at the end of the liturgy, words of remembrance, since they typically do not reinforce the hopeful message of the preceding liturgy, too often feel like an unwelcome disconnect with everything that has gone before.

We risk losing everything that the funeral Mass has been trying to accomplish, that is, helping those who mourn to move from grief into hope.

(Fr.) MARK HORAK, SJ

Decatur, Georgia

***

The height of clericalism and insensitivity to people, mandating the eulogies must be no longer than three minutes and approved in advance in writing by a cleric.

That will surely be a welcome sign for "nones" to return to church, not!

JOHN CHUCHMAN

Scottsdale, Arizona

Join the Conversation

Send your thoughts and ideas, reactions and responses to letters@ncronline.org. The editor will collect them, curate them and publish a sampling in Letters to the Editor online or in our print edition.

We cannot publish everything. We will do our best to represent the full range of letters received. Here are the rules:

- Letters to the editor should be submitted to letters@ncronline.org.
- Letters to the editor should be limited to 250 words.
- Letters must include your name, street address, city, state and zip code. We will publish your name and city, state, but not your full address.
- If the letter refers to a specific article published at ncronline.org, please send in the headline or the link of the article.
- Please include a daytime telephone number where we can reach you. We will not publish your phone number. It may be used for verification.

We can't guarantee publication of all letters, but you can be assured that your submission will receive careful consideration.

Published letters may be edited for length and style.

Advertisement

This story appears in the **Your thoughts** feature series. View the full series.