Vatican

Vatican News



People walking through St. Peter's Square are seen from the dome of St. Peter's Basilica at the Vatican in this March 11, 2013, file photo. (CNS/Reuters/Eric Gaillardi)

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Pope Francis, who will celebrate his 88th birthday in December, has approved simplified liturgical rites for the death of a pontiff.

His body will rest in a zinc-lined wooden casket, according to the new rites. Recent popes had been buried inside a cypress wood coffin surrounded by another coffin made of lead, which was then covered by a third wooden coffin.

Vatican News carried a story Nov. 20 about the second edition of the "Ordo Exsequiarum Romani Pontificis" ("Funeral Rites of the Roman Pontiff"); the book updates the rites originally approved by St. John Paul in 1998, technically published in 2000, but released only when St. John Paul died in 2005. Modified versions of the rites were used after Pope Benedict XVI died Dec. 31, 2022.

Archbishop Diego Ravelli, master of papal liturgical ceremonies, told Vatican News the revised edition was needed, "first of all because Pope Francis asked, as he himself stated on several occasions, to simplify and adapt some of the rites so that the celebration of the bishop of Rome's funeral would better express the church's faith in the risen Christ."

And, he said, the revised rites highlight "even more that the Roman Pontiff's funeral is that of a shepherd and disciple of Christ and not of a powerful man of this world."

Francis approved the new rites April 29 and received the first printed copy of the book Nov. 4, Vatican News reported.

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The new rites maintain the practice of having the deceased pope's body placed in St. Peter's Basilica for public viewing and prayer before the funeral. However, instead of lying on a catafalque, that is, a kind of decorated platform, the body will be placed inside the coffin which will remain open until the night before the funeral, the Vatican News article said.

The rites still are divided into three "stations" based on the place they occur: "at home, in the Vatican basilica and at the burial place." However, instead of ritually

verifying the death of the pope in his bedroom, the new rite specifies that it take place in his private chapel and that he be placed inside the coffin before being carried into St. Peter's Basilica.

Vatican News reported the book also includes "the necessary indications for possible burial in a place other than the Vatican basilica." Francis said in an interview a year ago that he plans on being buried at Rome's Basilica of St. Mary Major.

Much of the revision has to do with updated language in the prayers and Scripture readings to match revised translations of the Mass prayers, Lectionary and Bible in Latin and in Italian, Ravelli said. And more saints, including all of the popes who have been canonized, are included in the Litany of Saints chanted as the body of the deceased pope is carried in procession from his private chapel into St. Peter's Basilica.

The revised rites still call for memorial Masses to be celebrated at the Vatican for nine days after his funeral.

Ravelli said the rites give precise indications for celebrating the funeral and burial of "a disciple of Christ chosen as successor of Peter."