



Christian Symbols at the Funeral

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Numerous symbols are employed in Catholic funerals. Here is what each one stands for:



Holy water: A reminder of the deceased's membership in the Body of Christ through baptism. Holy water is used to welcome the body or remains into the church and at the time of the final commendation.



Easter candle: The Easter, or paschal, candle reminds Christians of Christ's presence among us. Blessed each year at the Easter Vigil, the presence of the candle at the funeral also reminds the assembly of that night when, in hope, the Church anticipates Christ's resurrection.



Pall: It is customary in the United States and other places to place a white cloth over the casket or remains, called a pall. This is another reminder of baptism — when each of the baptized receives a white garment that signifies their dignity. The pall also symbolizes that each person is equal in the eyes of an all-loving and merciful Father.

Book of Gospels or Bible: Christians model their lives on the Word of God and so it might be appropriate to place a Bible or Book of the Gospels atop the casket or near the remains during the funeral Mass. It reminds the assembly of the deceased's fidelity to the Word in this life that leads them to newness of life in eternity.



Cross: A cross or crucifix may be placed atop the casket or near the remains during the funeral Mass. This reminds us of the primary Christian symbol with which we were signed at baptism and by which Christ redeemed the world and won victory over sin and death.



Incense: Incense serves a twofold purpose in the funeral rites. It is used as a symbol of our respect for the deceased's body, which became a temple of the Holy Spirit in baptism. And it also represents the prayers of the assembly on their behalf, rising to God's throne.

Flowers: Flowers may be used "in moderation" (OCF, No. 38). Some parishes have specific rules on the use of flowers, so it is a good idea to check with the parish staff before making arrangements.



Liturgical color: For funeral Masses in the United States, the sacred ministers may wear white, violet or black vestments. "The liturgical color chosen for funerals should express Christian hope but should not be offensive to human grief or sorrow" (OCF, No. 39). This is the choice of the sacred minister, but if you have a preference, feel free to express it.