

## A word about Eulogies

I ran this in the bulletin a while ago. I think it bears restating. So many grieving families seem to think that we are trying to deny them a privilege, when the truth is that we are truly trying to help them through one of the most difficult situations we can face – the death of a loved one. Please see this in that context.

Fr. Holz

### A word about Eulogies

Many of us have faced times in our lives when we become overwhelmed by situations bigger than ourselves. Death of a loved one is one of those occasions. We come to the church, to God Himself, to help us get through these incredibly difficult times. We come here remembering that Jesus told us “Blessed are those who mourn, they will find comfort.” We come here for that comfort. We also come as a people confident in the fact that God has a plan for each of us that is bigger than this reality, and we come to Him on behalf of our loved one.

The church recognizes three distinct phases in her process when a loved one and member of her family is called home to God. She recognizes a process which is the most beneficial for the family, and for the loved one.

The process begins at the Vigil Service (the wake). The family and loved ones gather together in the presence of the body. Family and friends bind themselves together for consolation and strength at this time of loss. The Church comes to be present, just as Jesus was present to His people. The church offers formal prayers which may be led by a priest, deacon or a lay person. This is the formal portion of the prayers.

The prayer continues in the remembrances and stories about the loved one. This type of praying binds those who remain together. “Remember when he...” or “How often she...” We share these stories with each other. How often one person’s reflection will spark a memory in someone else, who may speak, and that sparks something in someone else. The binding together gets even tighter, as it should be. This is obviously the most appropriate place, and the exact point of Eulogy.

Recalling to mind what bound us to the loved one to bind ourselves to each other. This is a deeply spiritual practice. It is also beneficial, logistically, to schedule the eulogy at the vigil service as there is a greater flexibility with time and content. We know that it is not possible to even list the most important aspects of a persons’ life, let alone reflect on them in two or three minutes.

There may be limits in a parish, especially one such as ours, where there may be multiple funerals on the same day. At the funeral home there is no such constriction. As for content, in some lives the aspects

which touch us most may not be the ones highlighted in church. Someone's love of sports, or cooking, or Atlantic City may truly be a part of who they were and what bound us to them. It is an appropriate remembrance, but not necessarily appropriate in church. We wouldn't want to not mention a portion of a person's life which bound us to them, so we say it in the funeral home.

The next phase in the process is the Funeral Mass. Bound together, we come to church and have the sacrifice of the Mass, the sacrifice of Jesus Himself, for our loved one. We offer God to God on behalf of our loved one. Jesus as the sacrifice, Jesus as the priest, and Jesus as the one who opened the gates of heaven for us. He who came that we might be saved. Jesus, who rose from the dead, as a human, to offer that to all humanity, we call on Him on behalf of our loved one. There is nothing bigger than that. We let that sacrifice stand on its own with our attention to Him in prayers for the deceased.

The final phase of the process is the Rite of Committal, the rites said at the place of repose. All remains (including ashes) should be interred reverently and with prayer. Ashes are treated with the same respect as a body. They should not be separated or kept in the home. They should be treated with the dignity that befits the person themselves. The cemetery is a place of union for the faithful departed – as a community, that community along with the communion of saints, and together with us, in our community, which continues with our loved ones still as members.

Summing up on the point of eulogies, when a minister of consolation says to a grieving family that we don't have eulogies at Mass, it should NOT be seen as a denial of a privilege, but rather as the minister trying to assist people in grief along a process that works.

May the souls of the faithful departed rest in peace. Amen.