

Words in Remembrance— Crafting What You'd Like to Say

The Catholic funeral rites permit someone to speak words in remembrance at the vigil for the deceased and at the funeral Mass. Many families want someone—or several persons—to speak to the assembled mourners. The liturgy of the church permits one.

Less is more. These words are a very small part of the entire funeral liturgy, and they should not divert the attention of the faithful from the common prayers being shared. For the sake of the funeral liturgy, if someone is speaking at Mass, that person should come prepared and aware of the purpose of these words within the flow of the entire service.

If you are going to make some remarks, you have a noble opportunity to help people through their grief. Here are some tips to bear in mind:

- Write out what you want to say. And stick to your script when you speak.
- Keep it short. If you go over 500 words, you are in danger of drawing more attention to yourself and less to Christ, who is the center of the funeral liturgy.
- Find out where you are supposed to stand, and test the microphone before the funeral begins. Ideally, you should not stand at the ambo, which is reserved for the reading of Sacred Scripture. Your microphone may be the one that the song-leader uses, for example.
- Find out when you are supposed to speak. Whether you are speaking at the vigil for the deceased or at the funeral Mass, your remarks may come near the end of the service. In some parishes, you may be asked to speak before the service begins. Speak with the person arranging the funeral liturgy. Be sure you know when to step forward.

- Remember that people are going to hear a lot of words at the funeral. They will hear prayers carefully prepared by the Catholic Church for such occasions. They will hear a homily that the preacher has prepared. They will sing songs that will touch their hearts. Most importantly, they will hear passages of Sacred Scripture. Although you have some dear memories to share, the Scriptures bear the primary responsibility for forming lives.
- The Catholic funeral ritual permits you to speak, but originally the liturgy called your talk “words of greeting,” not “words in remembrance.” The original concept is that you would greet the assembly on behalf of the family, thank them for coming, that sort of thing. Originally, it was not designed to be anything more than a courteous expression of gratitude focused on the mourners, not on the person who has died.
- You are not responsible for giving a complete biography. If you have more than 500 words you want to share, perhaps you could post it as a video on the web. That will actually broaden your audience beyond those who can attend the funeral. And your words will last a much longer time. Ask about having a link printed in a funeral booklet or on the parish website.
- Pray about what you will say, and let your words come from a heart of faith. You will contribute to the overall memories forged by those who attend a Catholic funeral.