

To Clergy and Local Funeral Directors

In reading obituaries and death announcements, liturgical services are progressively being called "Celebrations of Life". While the liturgies of the Church are in fact celebrations of life, this label gives the mistaken impression that these celebrations primarily reflect on the life of the deceased. While this may be true of the visitation before or the collation after, it should not be true regarding the Roman Catholic Funeral Mass or Funeral Liturgy Outside of Mass. "Christians celebrate the funeral rites to offer worship, praise, and thanksgiving to God for the gift of a life which has now been returned to God...The Mass, the memorial of Christ's death and resurrection, is the principal celebration of the Christian funeral." Order of Christian Funerals (OCF) #5

As we come together to comfort the deceased's family and friends and fondly remember events of the past, we are also participants in other-worldly ministries: "The Church through its funeral rites commends the dead to God's merciful love and pleads for the forgiveness of their sins. At the funeral rites...The Christian community affirms and expresses the union of the Church on earth with the Church in heaven in the one great communion of saints." OCF #6 "The celebration of the Christian funeral brings hope and consolation to the living...the funeral rites also recall to all who take part in them God's mercy and judgment and meet the human need to turn always to God in times of crisis." OCF #7

Therefore, all pastors and funeral directors should discourage those in charge of writing obituaries and other announcements from using terms like "Celebrations of Life" or "Mass of the Resurrection". It should be listed as either a *Funeral Mass*, *Mass of Christian Burial*, or if it is not a Mass, *Funeral Liturgy*, through a compassionate explanation to the author of the Christ-centeredness of the Church's Liturgies.

Two additional paragraphs might be worthy of quoting and remembering.

- "A brief homily based on the readings is always given after the gospel reading at the funeral liturgy...but there is never to be a eulogy. Attentive to the grief of those present, the homilist should dwell on God's compassionate love and on the paschal mystery of the Lord, as proclaimed in the Scripture readings. The homilist should also help the members of the assembly to understand that the mystery of God's love and the mystery of Jesus' victorious death and resurrection were present in the life and death of the deceased and that these mysteries are active in their own lives as well. Through the homily members of the family and community should receive consolation and strength to face the death of one of their members with a hope nourished by the saving word of God." OCF #27
- "Music is integral to the funeral rites." OCF #30 "Music should be provided for the vigil and funeral liturgy." OCF #32