St Mary's Catholic Church, Thetford

Guidance for Funerals

For the Catholic Church, the most important gift that we can offer those who have died, is that a Mass is said for the repose of their soul. For that reason, the usual form of funeral service at St Mary's is a Requiem Mass followed either by a cremation or a burial. We will not normally consider offering "just" a cremation, as this does not involve a Mass.

One advantage of this arrangement is that there are in effect two services, for example one at the church, and one at the crematorium afterwards. This means that some elements which it would not be possible to include in a church service, can be included at the crematorium.

The format of a Requiem Mass is very beautiful and very ancient, but cannot be changed. There is some choice in Bible readings, but these are taken from a set list of texts which the Church will provide. Any music has to be in keeping with the liturgy: it is not possible to have secular music, for example. There is moreover no space allocated for a eulogy in the Requiem Mass (GIRM 382).

At the crematorium, however, there is the possibility of giving a eulogy (or even two eulogies); of different texts being read out, and of different music being played. When arranging a funeral, then, it is helpful to divide the different elements of the day into three parts: (1) what will take place in the church, (2) what will take place at the crematorium or place of interrment; and (3) what will take place at the wake or social gathering afterwards.

The priest will carefully guide you in making the choices that are available, and in making sure that the service for the deceased is as good as it possibly can be. Please be aware that most priests' diaries are booked up many months in advance, so do not make a firm commitment to a particular date until you have first confirmed that the priest will be available.

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