The coffin is covered in a white cloth, called a ‘ pall’. This is a reminder of baptism when the newly baptised person is presented with a white garment as a symbol of being washed clean of the sin that separates humans from God. Also, because every coffin is covered in a pall, it is a reminder that all are equal in the eyes of God. So everyone is worthy of salvation through Christ.

The Book of the Gospels is sometimes placed on the coffin. This is to remind people that Christians live by the teachings of Jesus given and the example he sets in the Gospel and that by doing this they will have eternal life. A cross is often placed on the coffin. The baptism ceremony includes the priest or deacon making the sign of the cross on the person to mark their joining the Christian community. It is through Jesus’ death on the cross and his resurrection that he defeated death and brought salvation for humans.

In baptism, (name) received the sign of the cross. May he/she now share in Christ’s victory over death.

The Paschal candle is often placed beside the coffin as a symbol of belief in the Resurrection. Flowers may be placed on the coffin but in moderation, so that they do not hide these important symbols of faith and hope.

At the beginning and end of the funeral the coffin is sprinkled with holy water. The coffin is also sprinkled with holy water before being buried or cremated. Once again this is a reminder of the water used in baptisms and the gift of eternal life. The accompanying prayer is:

‘In the waters of baptism, (name) died with Christ and rose with him to new life. May he/she now share with him eternal glory.’

At the end of the funeral the coffin is incensed as a sign of honouring the person, whose body was a temple of the Holy Spirit. The incense also symbolises the prayers of those gathered rising up to God.

Processions are a traditional way of acknowledging the importance of the deceased or members of the family regularly attended Mass. Eucharist. This would be particularly appropriate if the deceased or members of the family

1. What is the name of the white cloth that covers the coffin?
2. What two things does the white cloth remind us of?
3. Why is the Book of the Gospels sometimes placed on the coffin?
4. When and why is the coffin sprinkled with holy water?
5. What two things does the white cloth remind us of?
6. What is the Latin term for rest?
7. What is the Latin term for baptism?
8. What is the Latin term for Easter?
9. What is the Latin term for the Resurrection?
10. What is the Latin term for the Eucharist?

In the waters of baptism, (name) died with Christ and rose with him to new life. May he/she now share with him eternal glory.

The readings from Scripture will be chosen to remind those present of the promise of resurrection and eternal life. Those readings will be a source of comfort for those grieving and a declaration of hope.

The prayers throughout the funeral will refer to baptism, to Easter and the Resurrection, to Jesus’ sacrifice on the cross and the fact that because of this, Christians can hope for eternal life after death.

The priest or deacon will use their homily (sermon) to explain the Christian belief that Jesus defeated death through his resurrection and that this means that Christians can hope to have an eternal life with God after death. This should bring further comfort to the family and friends. The prayers of intercession will include prayers for the dead, for the grieving family and friends and for the wider community.

Although not a requirement of the funeral rite, many funerals in Catholic churches would include the Liturgy of the Eucharist. This would be particularly appropriate if the deceased or members of the family regularly attended Mass. Some funerals include a short ‘eulogy’. This is a where a relative or friend speaks about the life of the deceased person and can be a celebration of their positive contribution to the lives of their family and friends.