Funerals help us hush the busy world…

By Dan Delmore

A favorite daily prayer of mine, by John Henry Cardinal Newman, asks God to support us all day long, “till the shades lengthen and the evening comes, and the busy world is hushed, and the fever of life is over, and our work is done…”

The prayer tells us how important it is at day’s end to set aside our tasks and phones and to-do lists and relinquish ourselves to God’s care — as the prayer puts it, giving us “a safe lodging, and a holy rest and peace at the last.”

But in today’s fast-paced, on-the-go world, many of us have trouble slowing down and taking time for pause and reflection. That seems to be particularly true at the time of death of a family member or friend. There seems to be a rush to get things over with and back to “normal.”

It didn’t use to be that way. I vividly remember the days after my grandfather died many years ago. The rites took three full days as family and friends took part in vigils, said rosaries and attended the funeral itself.

In my work as a funeral director over the past nearly 40 years, I have seen a dramatic change in how our culture treats death. Often expediency plays a bigger role in funeral planning than the traditions and rituals of our faith. When that happens, I believe we have lost something important, not only a link to our past but also the therapeutic value of the funeral liturgy for grieving family and friends.

In the case of cremation, for example, the Church’s preference is that the body be present for the Funeral Mass and that cremation takes place afterward and prior to the committal. Because the body is considered the temple of the Holy Spirit, the service begins with welcoming the body, the sprinkling of holy water and the placement of the pall on the casket as reminders of the deceased’s baptism. This is the powerful message of the resurrection that is the foundation of our Catholic faith.

However, many people choose to have the body cremated before the funeral service, often with the urn present at the service. There may be valid reasons for this, but I always encourage Catholic families to consider the Catholic practice on cremation in their decision-making because the liturgy, with the body present, offers beauty, meaning and solace.

Likewise, Catholic teaching calls for the cremated remains of the body to be committed to the ground or in a niche, preferably in a Catholic cemetery. Yet it’s very common today for people to not use a cemetery, instead scattering cremated remains or keeping them in a closet at home or dividing them up among family members. Sometimes families do nothing at all, leaving the urn of cremated remains of their loved one at our funeral home.

Besides not showing respect for the deceased, it results in a lack of closure, hindering the process of healing after a loss in the months and years that follow. With committal in a cemetery, on the other hand, we treat the cremated remains with dignity, and we have a place to visit, pray, remember and honor the individual who died. Committal is an essential piece in the Catholic funeral order and it has the power to bind families together generation after generation.

From beginning to end, from the vigil to committal, funerals tell us to stop and reflect on the important things of life — “to hush the busy world.” For our departed loved ones, we can rest assured that God has provided them with “a safe lodging, and a holy rest and peace at the last.”

Dan Delmore has been a funeral director since 1976. Dan Delmore is the owner of Gearty-Delmore Funeral Chapels. Dan is a member of The Church of St. Bartholomew in Wayzata and is active in Archdiocesan organizations.

Understanding the Order of Christian Funerals

For the last 25 years or so, the means by which the Catholic Church ritualizes death is through what is called “The Order of Christian Funerals.”

Primarily, there are three major rites for the family, friends and parishioners to gather and celebrate the promise of the Resurrection and the life of a loved one — the Vigil, the Funeral Mass and the Committal and Burial.

Often times the temptation is to truncate these rites for the sake of convenience. Yet by having only an hour visitation before Mass, much of the richness of prayer, storytelling and remembering is lost. Instead, consider taking the time to honor the deceased by having a vigil (a wake) the evening before. The Funeral Mass is normally held in the parish church, the spiritual home of the deceased. It is wise to meet with parish personnel prior to death to plan the funeral according to parish guidelines. Lastly, is the committal and burial in the cemetery. It is the final ritual of prayer and a means of saying good-bye as we leave the loved one in a sacred place.

When cremation is the option, note that burial or inurnment takes on the same importance. We treat the cremated remains with the same respect as we do a full body.

Because there are many cemetery options to consider, it is important take the time to think through all the options and to plan accordingly.

For more information, visit The Catholic Cemeteries web site at www.catholic-cemeteries.org or contact your parish.
Week of September 10, 2022

Partners in ministry reach out to parents who have experienced early pregnancy loss

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ast December, during the second trimester of Tara Bromen’s pregnancy, Tara and her husband Greg were devastated to learn their baby had died in utero. Several days later, Tara miscarried and had to be hospitalized at St. John’s Hospital in Maplewood.

In the midst of their grief, the couple was heartened to find out that HealthEast Care System is a partner with The Catholic Cemeteries in a program specifically for parents who have experienced early pregnancy losses due to miscarriage or other reasons prior to birth. The Fairview Health Services also partners in the ministry.

The program provides for the communal burial of fetal remains in the Children's Section at Resurrection Cemetery as well as a quarterly burial and committal service for families.

“The miscarriage was an incredible shock to us and we didn’t know what to do. When the chaplain at St. John’s told us about the program, it was like a weight lifted off our shoulders,” said Greg, who with his wife and two children attend St. John’s Church in Little Canada. “It was very comforting to know that our baby would be treated with dignity and buried in a Christian cemetery, and also that we could have our baby’s name inscribed on the Wall of Remembrance at Resurrection.”

In February, the Bromens attended the Prayer Service of Burial and Committal in the Resurrection Cemetery Chapel Mausoleum along with a few dozen other families who had experienced similar loss. Following readings, songs and prayers, each family received a lighted memorial candle and attendees processed by car to the gravesite for prayers and burial.

“The service was very healing for us,” said Greg. “After the miscarriage, our family and friends were very supportive, but may not have understood the magnitude of our loss. At the service, our loss felt validated. We were not alone in our grief.”

Sheila Priebe, a labor and delivery nurse who recently retired from the HealthEast System, said HealthEast’s partnership with The Catholic Cemeteries has been a positive step toward affirming parents who experienced early pregnancy loss.

“This program lets families know they have a right to bury their babies, and provides a dignified and meaningful way to do it, at no cost to them,” she said.

Besides the two health systems, Gill Brothers Funeral Services takes part, providing the small white caskets for the fetal remains and transportation. Also participating are Deacon Bill Umphress who presides over the service and John Evans who provides music. Several volunteers from St. Peter’s Parish in Mendota offer hospitality.

“We are very grateful for the sensitivity and generosity of everyone involved in this ministry and outreach to grieving parents,” said Sister Fran Donnelly, B.V.M., Director of Life Transition Ministries for The Catholic Cemeteries. “It is a partnership in the best sense of the word.”

For Greg and Tara Bromen, the program came to them as an invaluable gift. “We are eternally grateful for the compassion and comfort provided by this ministry.”

If you would like to support this ministry...

The Catholic Cemeteries ministry to bereaved families who have lost children by miscarriage or other reasons prior to birth is supported through the Archbishop Harry J. Flynn Compassionate Assistance Fund, which covers the cost for the markers and other related expenses. This Fund also helps to defray some of the costs of a burial for families who are in need of special assistance. To make a gift or to learn more, visit our web site at www.catholic-cemeteries.org.
Cleaning graves at Calvary

It’s dirty work, but St. Agnes 8th graders love it

Historic Calvary Cemetery is not far from St. Agnes School in St. Paul, but until recently, it wasn’t on the field trip roster for St. Agnes 8th graders. That has changed, thanks to religion teacher Joan Decker. For the second year in a row, Decker, and fellow teacher Mother Marie Andre, have brought the school’s 8th grade class to Calvary for an experience that combines hard work, service, acts of mercy and a compelling history lesson.

On a chilly afternoon last October, 45 students piled off the bus, each with a new pair of work gloves. Grabbing rakes and tools, they went to work clearing off the leaves and digging away the turf that has gradually covered the graves of religious sisters as well as graves in the infant section.

Also that day, each student had the opportunity to make a rubbing of a marker of one person for whom they will pray for during the next year. They also learned about early settlers in St. Paul who are buried at Calvary in a history lesson by Linda Radtke, Calvary office manager.

Decker said that initially, some students felt hesitant or a bit fearful about a trip to a cemetery, but not for long.

“Our students fell in love with Calvary. They are in awe of the history of the cemetery and the religious people buried there who served the Church so long ago,” she said. “Visiting Calvary is a very positive experience for these students and we plan to do it annually.”

Decker got the idea while visiting family graves at Resurrection Cemetery. She and her husband stopped at the graves of the Hawthorne Dominican sisters, who served at Our Lady of Good Counsel Cancer Home in St. Paul.

“My husband remarked that cleaning up the historic graves would be a great service project, and I thought that would be something our 8th graders could tackle,” she said.

Jon Louris, operations manager of The Catholic Cemeteries, said the help of volunteers like the St. Agnes 8th graders is greatly appreciated.

“Over the decades, hundreds of old gravestones have become overgrown and keeping them clear is beyond the capacity of our small staff,” Louris said. “These young people are doing a great service that honors the memories of those who served the church many years ago.”

Student reflections…

After the field trip, religion teacher Joan Decker asked her students to reflect on the acts of mercy they had performed at Calvary. Here are several excerpts:

“I saw Christ in the people who maintain the graves every day. This work is outside and hard because there are so many graves and a lot of land…”

“When doing the work at the cemetery my classmates didn’t complain and only kept working and it turned out great…”

“I don’t think very many people appreciate those who came before us and have died. Doing this project helped me learn that Christian service means it is more important to serve others before yourself…”

Granite benches made possible by generous donors

The spring/summer 2013 issue of Heritage included a brief item about the infant section of Gethsemane Cemetery in New Hope, seeking a donor to help underwrite the costs of a new bench where parents and grandparents could sit and pray while visiting the graves of their infants.

Two generous couples stepped forward, and today, two beautiful granite benches grace the infant section. Both prefer to remain anonymous but shared some thoughts about their gesture.

“The newsletter item struck our hearts. We have five beautiful children, but my wife also had a miscarriage and that was a very sad thing. We hope the bench offers some comfort to parents who have lost a child.”

“We live close to Gethsemane and in nice weather, I walk through it almost every day. The children’s section has always been special to us. When we read about the need for the benches, we knew we wanted to help.”

Calvary Columbarium dedication and open house coming soon

Calvary Cemetery will dedicate its new columbarium after mass on Memorial Day. Fr. Kevin McDonough, pastor of St. Peter Claver parish in St. Paul and Incarnation/Sagrado Corazon de Jesus in Minneapolis, will preside. In addition, an open house will be held on Friday, June 13, Saturday, June 14, and Sunday, June 15 from 10:00 AM to 2:00 PM each day. This beautiful columbarium is located off of Front Street near the five garden mausoleums at the Victoria Street entrance to the cemetery.

Since the need for additional cremation burial spaces is critical at historic Calvary Cemetery, interested family members may want to inquire now about purchasing as the inventory of niches may quickly diminish. Special discounts are extended, and interest free financing is available to open house attendees on this weekend. Refreshments will be served.

To learn more, contact Michael LaBelle, family service counselor, at 651-488-8866.
Grave decorations for Memorial Day
During the days before and after Memorial Day, artificial flowers, potted plants, decorations or other ornaments are allowed. These types of decorations can be placed on graves beginning at noon on Thursday, May 22, and remain there until Sunday, June 1. Decorations should be removed by this date; otherwise, the cemetery staff will begin pickup on Monday, June 2. After that time, we request fresh-cut flowers only during the growing season.

Memorial Day flowers available for purchase
Over the Memorial Day weekend, a variety of floral bouquets are available for purchase at Resurrection, Gethsemane, St. Mary’s, and Calvary Cemeteries. Flower stands are located near the entrances of each cemetery.

Recognizing veterans over Memorial Day weekend
As in 2013, this Memorial Day, The Catholic Cemeteries will offer a special salute to all veterans as part of the masses beginning at noon on Thursday, May 22, and remain there until Sunday, June 1. Decorations should be removed by this date; otherwise, the cemetery staff will begin pickup on Monday, June 2. After that time, we request fresh-cut flowers only during the growing season.

Join us on Memorial Day
May 26, 2014 | 10 a.m. Mass

• Special recognition of veterans at all cemeteries
• Refreshments at all cemeteries
• Dedication of the new columbarium at Calvary Cemetery

Mass will be held at 10 a.m. RAIN OR SHINE at Gethsemane Cemetery, St. Anthony’s Cemetery, St. Mary’s Cemetery, Resurrection Cemetery and Calvary Cemetery.

MEMORIAL DAY WEEKEND HOURS
Each Cemetery office has extended hours as follows:
Saturday: 8 a.m. - 4 p.m.
Sunday: 10 a.m. - 4 p.m.
Monday: 8 a.m. - 4 p.m.