



At funerals in other denominations – both Protestant and Roman Catholic – there are generally personal reminiscences by friends and family members. The Episcopal Church doesn't permit that; we can only use the fixed Prayer Book liturgy as well as have flowers only at the Altar and a closed coffin. Why can't the Episcopal Church be more responsive to what people today want at a funeral?

There are many customs – some formal, some informal - which are kept by people in our culture at the time of death. Many are a crucial part of grieving. The funeral liturgy is an important element of that process.

In the Episcopal Church the funeral liturgy is intentionally very normal and at the same time unique. The liturgy is normal in the sense that it is very much like the worship that the deceased person and his/her family attended Sunday-by-Sunday; deliberately there are no exotic or dramatic elements. What this is saying is that what has happened is a completely normal part of life and is completely in God's hands. At the time of death this is a very comforting reminder and is something for which visitors at Episcopal funerals often thank us.

The liturgy, however, is also unique. We gather on this occasion to do four specific things:

- Honor the body of the deceased which, while no longer the person, is the creation of God and was the “temple of his/her spirit.” It was the form in which we knew the person, and it is important that we provide closure on that part of our relationship.
- Proclaim the Christian doctrine of life, death, and resurrection to the new life which Jesus Christ promised to all who are faithful and made possible for us by His own incarnation, suffering and sacrificial death, and resurrection.
- Pray for the person who is now a part of the Church Expectant in Paradise that he/she may continue his/her growth in Christ until he/she is made perfect and shares in the life of the Triune God in the fullness of His presence in Heaven.
- Celebrate the Sacrament of the Eucharist in which not only does Jesus Christ Himself really and actually become present under the appearances of bread and wine, but He also brings with Him the whole company of the Church Expectant in Paradise and the Church Triumphant in Heaven. Thus the deceased person him/herself along with all those whom we love and who have gone on before us, as well as the Blessed Virgin Mary, the Apostles, Martyrs, and all the Saints throughout the ages, are truly present with us at the Altar.

We do not have a eulogy or other remembrances of the deceased person, not because these are unimportant, but because on this particular occasion we are focusing not on the past but on the person's new life in the present and promise of greater life in the future. Appropriately, the Church is doing for the family and friends in this liturgy those things that only the Church can do for them.

In this liturgy we are affirming and rejoicing in the promise that we as Christians can all share together in the same journey of growth into the fullness of what God created us to be, and that by God's grace we can all share together in the glory of unending life in the community of the Triune God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.