

WEEKLY LETTER FROM MONSIGNOR KEN

How many “To Do” lists do you have? Whether actually written down, or just a mental note, we use them all the time—for home, for school, work, or even vacations. They are helpful because they serve as a reminder, but also can give us a sense of satisfaction as we check off tasks on our list.
Here’s one that you probably don’t have, and even though it can be depressing, it is important. It’s a Catholic “To Do” List for Death and Dying! I thought it was important to mention this, in part because November is the month of All Souls, but also because I have noticed that many Catholics have forgotten or overlooked some of these points.

These steps are important, but also serve as a comforting guide for this most difficult time of illness and death. Of course, a lot more can be said about each point, but I only want to list them to bring to your attention.

1. When someone is seriously ill, this does not mean that they are dying, such as a diagnosis and more serious operation, receive the Sacrament of Anointing That’s what it’s for. Also, DON’T WAIT until the last minute to call a priest, unless something happens unexpectedly. Then, definitely call.
2. It is helpful to make pre-arrangements for a funeral. This includes making your wishes known, especially in terms of your faith. Many times, faithful and devoted Catholics are not granted the opportunity for a Mass and burial because family members in charge are not practicing. Be sure to make your desires known.
3. If at all possible, have a funeral Mass for the deceased. It is permissible to have a Liturgy at the funeral home, but as Catholics, it is expected to have the Sacrifice of Mass offered for the deceased.
4. Cremation is permitted, and has become the choice for many. However, the preference is to have the funeral Mass, first, followed by cremation. It is permissible to have direct cremation, followed by the Mass, but, if possible, it should be the Mass first. Cremains may be brought to church for the funeral Mass.
5. Cremated remains ARE TO BE BURIED. The ashes should be treated exactly like the body. Ashes should not be scattered, or kept in a home, and never placed in jewelry. The body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, and should be properly buried in the ground or a crypt or niche.
6. Celebrations of Life are wonderful, but should not replace the funeral rites of the Church. It is important to remember that the Church is not only helping families grieve for their loved ones and honor their memory, it also reminds us of our ultimate destination, or final goal, which is heaven. Our focus should not be only on this life, but eternity.
7. Eulogies, or Words of Remembrance are permitted, although many parishes do not allow. It is helpful to remember that they can be spoken during the wake, or even at a repast. Regardless, they should not be too long, and besides remembering the person’s special qualities and accomplishments, should highlight their faith.

I hope this is a helpful list and guide. Please feel free to discuss or even share. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to ask. There is no such thing as a bad question. There is a beautiful introduction to the prayers for the Vigil that captures the purpose and belief expressed by the Church in these guidelines:
“My brothers and sisters, we believe that all the ties of friendship and affection which knit as one throughout our lives do not unravel with death. Confident that God always remembers the good we have done and forgives our sins, let us pray to God to gather our brother or sister to Himself.”

“He went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. After he had taken the body down, he wrapped it in a linen cloth and laid Him in a rock-hewn tomb in which no one had yet been buried.” (Luke 23:52-53)