

FAITH CHAT

with James & John

Can Eulogies Distort Church Teaching?

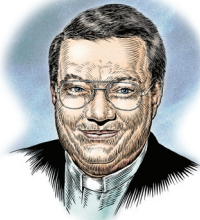
Know This...

Even for Christians who believe in the resurrection, death challenges our faith. One of the strengths of Catholicism is its teaching on human death and the virtue of hope. When someone dies, the faithful live in the hope that the deceased is in heaven or is being purified before going to heaven. No one on earth can know with certainty the eternal destiny of the dead; but the living have a role to play in the after-life of others. We are called to offer prayers, Masses, and good works for them. When a eulogy proclaims with certainty that the person is in heaven, the Church's teaching on death is distorted.



John: A eulogy is a reflection, usually delivered by a close relative or friend, on the life of one who has died. It should be given at the funeral home, grave site, or luncheon.

James: Properly speaking, "words of remembrance," not "eulogies," are permitted in Catholic funeral liturgies. They avoid using words and expressions that presume the deceased is in heaven.

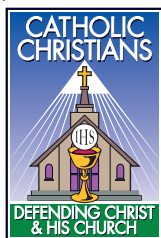


John: A funeral Mass focuses on the saving mercy and paschal mystery of Christ. It offers family and friends words and expressions of hope in our Lord's death and resurrection. Lengthy eulogies often detract from the continuity of the Mass and can obscure the Christian understanding of death.

James: The eulogist often "canonizes" the deceased while ignoring the virtue of hope and our need to offer prayers and good works for the dead. Poorly conceived and delivered eulogies can diminish the solemnity of the Mass and may distract us from the very intent of the funeral liturgy—to offer prayers for the eternal rest of the deceased.

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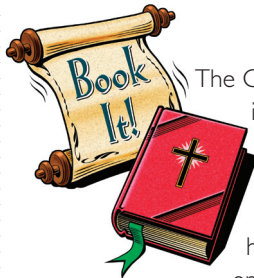


foundation of the world." Mt 25:34

"Whoever exalts himself will be humbled; but whoever humbles himself will be exalted." Mt 23:12 "He is not God of the dead but of the living." Mk 12:27 "Why do you seek the living among the dead." Lk 24:5 "Come, you who are blessed by my Father. Inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the



Official Church documents offer direction on eulogies at funeral Masses. "At the Funeral Mass there should, as a rule, be a short homily, but never a eulogy of any kind." General Instruction of the Roman Missal, (2000), "Masses for the Dead," 382 "A brief homily based on the readings should always be given at the funeral liturgy; but never any kind of eulogy. The homilist should dwell on God's compassionate love and on the paschal mystery of the Lord as proclaimed in the Scripture readings. Through the homily, the community should receive the consolation and strength to face the death of one of its members with a hope that has been nourished by the proclamation of the saving word of God." Order of Christian Funerals, (1989), "Funeral Liturgy," 141 "Following the prayer after communion, the priest goes to a place near the coffin... A member or a friend of the family may speak in remembrance of the deceased before the final commendation begins." IBID, "Funeral Mass," 170



The Old Testament, like the New, clearly says heaven isn't a "given" for anyone. "I have set before you life and death, the blessing and the curse. Choose life, then, that you and your descendants may live, by loving the Lord, your God, heeding his voice, and holding fast to him." Deut 30:19b-20a "Let not your heart envy sinners, but continue in the fear of the Lord all the day. Surely there is a future, and your hope will not be cut off." Prov 23:17-18 "Endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit which has been given to us." Rom 5:4-5 "We earnestly desire each of you to demonstrate the same eagerness for the fulfillment of hope until the end." Heb 6:11 In the Book of Revelation, John reveals this vision, "When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. But he laid his right hand upon me, saying, 'Fear not, I am the first and the last, and the living one; I died, and behold I am alive for evermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hades.'" Rev 1:17-18

God of the living and the dead, You never withhold Your mercy from those who call upon Your name in hope. Look kindly on those who precede me in death as You hear my prayers and all the prayers of Your Church. I pray that my life will be centered on You that I may depart this life confessing Your name. Grant this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

