



"Those who in baptism have become one with the dead and risen Christ will pass from death to life, to be purified in soul and welcomed into the fellowship of the saints in heaven," states the new Catholic funeral ritual. Woodcut is by German Renaissance artist Albrecht Durer.

Q. and A.

By FATHER RICHARD P. MCBRIEN

Q. There was a meeting of some European priests in early October which, in addition to the usual complaints about obligatory celibacy for the clergy, had some strange things to say about the election of the pope. In one of their committee reports, The Congress of Groups of Solidarity said that the pope should not be elected by an international synod of bishops (as people like Cardinal Suenens have suggested) but rather by the people of Rome themselves. "This method of election," the document stated, "would ensure that the pope would really be a first among equals, and no more than that." First of all, what can be said about the idea of Romans themselves electing the next pope; and, secondly, does present-day Catholic theology now speak of the pope as simply the first among equals?

A. There would be no intrinsic theological objection to the plan offered by the group in question. The pope is, indeed, the bishop of Rome, and those under his care and those whom he serves should have some voice in his selection, at least in principle.

However, the pope is more than the bishop of Rome. He is the head and center of the college of bishops. He is the pastor of the international brotherhood of eucharistic communities. He stands in the place of Peter as a source of unity for the Church universal. Accordingly, the Church beyond Rome should have some role, again in principle, in the process by which the pope is selected.

The suggestion of Cardinal Suenens at least involves the leaders of each of the local churches in the selection of the one who will stand in their midst as symbol of unity and of faith.

The notion that the pope is merely the "first among equals" has been advanced before. As the Catholic Church moves away from what many regard as excessive papalism, the idea of "primus inter pares" acquires new luster. An adequate critical response to the committee report, however, requires some fuller knowledge of what these European priests had in mind when they made their statement about the papal office.

Catholic theology continues to affirm the irreplaceable function of the pope within the college of bishops. (See the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, n. 22.) He is not just one bishop among many. He is more than "first among equals." A reform of the papal-selection process must take this theological and doctrinal fact into account.

Q. I attended Mass on Saturday evening because I expected to be going away early Sunday morning. However, our plans changed at the last minute, so I decided to go to Mass again on Sunday with the rest of the family. Since I received Holy Communion already the night before, I was wondering if I could receive again in the morning. I decided that I could, and I did. Was I right?

A. Yes.

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The Death of a Christian

By FATHER JOSEPH M. CHAMPLIN

Do you think we generally go to excess in making funeral arrangements? Are we almost forced to put on a show, select a casket beyond our means, follow an artificial protocol? Or do you feel lengthy calling hours, a solemn religious service, and the body's careful interment express respect for the deceased, faith in the Resurrection, and love of the bereaved?

The revised funeral rite, issued in 1969 doesn't really provide certain answers to these provocative questions. Article 2 of the Introduction merely states "family traditions, local customs, groups established to take care of funerals, anything that is good may be used freely, but anything alien to the Gospel should be changed."

Authorities in Rome have, with wisdom, stepped lightly in this area, leaving the judgment about specific practices to bishops and other individuals in each country. The ritual insists only that a funeral service celebrate Christ's paschal mystery and the dead person's share in Jesus' victory over death.

The funeral ritual possesses an element of flexibility made possible through its extensive collection of biblical readings and prayers. Preliminary directives suggest that a priest use those texts which best fit the wishes of the deceased's family and as much as possible "involve them in planning the funeral celebration and the choice of the options made available in this rite."

White vestments, symbolic not necessarily of the departed's innocence, but of his hoped-for rising to a glorious life, may be worn instead of black or purple.

The large paschal candle, carried in procession and placed near the casket, links together an entire network of related notions — baptism, the Resurrection, Easter and, of course, entrance into eternal bliss.

The rite after Mass, once called absolution, now has been changed to a service of final commendation. This is "not to be understood as a purification of the dead — which is effected rather by the eucharistic sacrifice — but as the last farewell with which the Christian community honors one of its members before the body is buried."

The sprinkling with holy water, which recalls the person's entrance into eternal life through baptism, and the incensation, which honors the body of the deceased as temple

of the Holy Spirit, may also be considered signs of farewell.

nity present prays for the departed and for the survivors.

A period of prayer between the time of death and burial ought to be arranged so people can pray for the dead and profess their own faith in eternal life.

Songs and psalms which express grief but strengthen hope should, whenever possible, form part of the rite.

Burial of the body in a grave or tomb, "as the Lord himself willed to be buried," enjoys the Church's preference, but cremation is permitted as long as the reasons for selecting this process are not "contrary to Christian principles."

The theological foundation for these ritual practices can be summed up in words from the funeral rite: "Those who in baptism have become one with the dead and risen Christ will pass from death to life, to be purified in soul and welcomed into the fellowship of the saints in heaven. They look forward in blessed hope to his second coming and the bodily resurrection of the dead." These prayers and burial services "which bring spiritual help to some may bring to others a consoling hope."

The cemetery prayers more actively involve mourners who stand by the grave for those final moments before the body is lowered into its resting place. They include a prayer of the faithful in which the commu-

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