

# The Importance of the Funeral Service and Cemetery

— by Daniel B. Gallagher

## As in life, so in death, IT'S NOT ABOUT YOU!

**Editor's Note:** The following is based on an article by Dan Gallagher in response to the changing attitude he has seen towards burial practices. It was published in their annual newsletter which was sent out to all parishes in the diocese.

This is a paradox principle, the message of the Gospel that we do not live for ourselves but for Him (CHRIST). "It is no longer I who lives but Christ in me." Lose your life and you will save it. Jesus was the greatest example in that He came not for Himself but to do the Father's will and sacrifice Himself for the sins of man.

The two greatest commandments are love GOD with all your heart, soul, strength and mind, and love thy NEIGHBOR as thyself. As I was thinking on these things, I felt the Lord impressed on my heart these words:

I AM FREE BECAUSE IT AIN'T ABOUT ME! True freedom comes when we think about others before ourselves.

In today's world culture it seems we have lost this principle, and respect for life. More importantly we have lost the fear of God and His love. We have become more self-centered, easily offended, angered, self absorbed, and busy. We can see this in many ways today, especially through abortion, euthanasia, and the way we treat our elderly and our young. We can also see this in the way society treats those who have died; it is in the lack of respect for the body that housed the spirit of GOD.

You say, "What does this have to do with cemeteries and funeral arrangements?" EVERYTHING!

You see, the funeral rituals offer comfort, support, healing and much more to the living, not YOU, the deceased. I frequently hear it said, "I don't want people to see me lying there;" or, "I don't care what they do with me."

Funeral Rituals are About the Life Lived

Let me say this again, it's not about YOU as a deceased person. It is about the life you lived and the lives you have touched. It's about the LIVING - your family, friends, neighbors, friends of friends and other people you may not even remember or know.

We need to be reminded of how important it is to allow people to participate in the visitation, service, funeral and burial.

I have often heard many people say that they do not want people to remember them in that way. Let me assure you, being 30 years in the death care industry, they will not! What it does is to help them to remember your life, celebrate, and bring about finality and healing.

Following is a letter written by a close friend of mine whose mother recently passed away:

*The benefits of funeral visitation are innumerable. My mother passed away a few short weeks ago and before that time I had always hesitated to attend funeral visitations. Funeral visitations were only for very close friends or*

*family members. I believed that if I went, my goal was to help console the family in some way, which was so far from what actually happened, because I would cry when I tried to speak to anyone. I hated going to the funeral home because I believed I was making a "fool" of myself. Where was the benefit to viewing someone who has already passed away?*

*As you can see, funeral visitation was based on "ME" (how I felt) and what I got out of the experience. I was wrong.*

*After taking part in my mother's visitation, I have a new perspective on funeral home visitation. I learned that it is extremely healing to be together as a family at this particular time. Without visitation, would all the cousins, aunts and uncles, nieces and nephews get together and reminisce? We talked about vacations together, holidays, and all the good food that my mom could make. We marveled at the babies, the college graduates, and the newly married couples.*

*Funeral visitation was very comforting to me as the daughter of the deceased. I saw hundreds of people that my mom's life made an impact on. That felt good. Visitors told of mom's quietness, her caring, her sense of humor, and most of all her love for everyone. I knew my mom was a sweet, quiet woman, but I never knew how being quiet could reach SO many people.*

*Many told of how my mom would just be there to listen (come to think of it, she did a lot of listening to me also!)*

*The most interesting part of funeral visitation was that I was actually comforting visitors as much as they were a comfort to me. Some were sobbing and unable to speak (that is usually me) and we would just hug each other for a few minutes and moved on to the next visitor. Without funeral visitation, where would this consoling and comforting come from?*

*One last impression of the importance of visitation was the actual viewing of my mother. I had spent the last week with her and had seen her at her physical worst. I was not looking forward to seeing her lying in a casket in that condition. To my surprise, she was beautiful! It was my mom before the cancer (before her chemotherapy, before the struggles!)*

*I've changed. I will try to visit or attend the funeral of friends and family without hesitation. Not because of the benefit that I will receive, but because of what impact my presence will make on the family that is grieving. A kind word, a few tears, and a loving embrace - that's what visitation is all about.*

The Cemetery is a Memorial to Your Life

In the same way, the cemetery is a memorial to your life, not your death. It is a place of remembrance, a place to bring about memories and healing, and a place for future generations to know something about your life and your heritage.

Cemeteries are keepers of history. If we would follow some of the ways people think today, we would not have the Lincoln memorial, Veterans memorials, Arlington Cemetery, or any of the great memorials and cemeteries. What does it matter? It does matter to the living. You may not be a president or a major historical figure, but your life is important to your family, friends and future generations.

Just a few months ago, a young girl came to the cemetery office to locate her grandfather's grave. I looked through all of our records and could not find him but did find her grandmother. She then recalled that someone mentioned that he had been cremated and possibly scattered. Needless to say, she left disappointed. No record, no grave, no memorial. Let's remember it's about them!!!!

This does not mean that you have to spend a lot of money for a traditional burial. Pre-planning is one way to avoid emotional overspending. Be informed, ask questions, be frugal, and stay within your means.

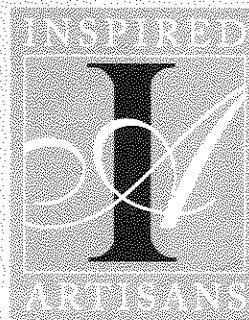
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*Corpus on the Cross*  
Fiberglass and Aluminum  
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*Calvary Crosses*  
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Dan Gallagher (third from left) is shown with the staff of Gethsemane Cemetery.

If you have chosen cremation, the cremated remains should be treated with respect since they are the remains of the human body. This treatment includes: visitation, the use of a worthy vessel to contain the remains, the manner in which they are carried, the care and attention to their appropriate placement and transport and their final placement.

Cremated remains should be buried or entombed to provide a recognized place for memorializing of the deceased. The practice of scattering cremated remains or keeping cremated remains in the home or car or with relatives and friends are not in keeping with reverent, respectable disposition, nor does it allow for proper healing of emotions, the grief and finality.

This life that GOD has so graciously given us is precious and wonderful. We celebrate one's birth, so we need to celebrate one's death.

*"Better to spend your time at a funeral than a party."*

— Ecclesiastes 7:2-4

After all, everyone dies, so the living should take heart. Sorrow is better than laughter, for sadness has a refining influence on us. A wise person thinks about death, while a fool thinks only about having a good time."

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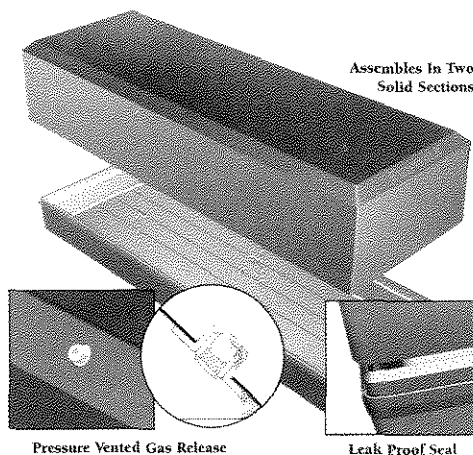
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