

# MOURNING DURING THE PANDEMIC

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A Guide to Celebrating Loved Ones Lost in the Midst of COVID-19



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# INTRODUCTION

The ongoing pandemic has caused a lot of upheaval, and, in the lives of some, huge losses. In this guide, one will find various resources for celebrating their lives, as well as thoughts on how to be present for loved ones who are grieving.

The following article, provided by *The Art of Dying Well*, describes how you can be present in the lives of those who are grieving.

## **Helping people cope with bereavement and grief in the wake of the pandemic**

Dr. Lynn Bassett, a retired healthcare chaplain, looks at some of the challenges to be faced in dealing with grief and bereavement as we slowly begin to emerge from lockdown following the onset of the coronavirus pandemic.

### **As lockdown begins to lift**

As schools and shops reopen, there is some sense that we can begin to get back to normal. However, for many of us things have changed; it is not so much a case of going back to the old normal way of life as finding our way out into a new normal.

This is particularly true for the tens of thousands of people, in this country alone, who have lost loved ones during the pandemic. Whether their friends or relatives have died from COVID-19 or from some other cause, the sadness and suffering of bereavement may have been magnified by the suddenness of the death and by the fact that it has not been possible to say goodbye in the ways that we would normally expect: hospitals and care homes have been forced to close their doors to visitors; funerals have been restricted to a minimum number of mourners; places of worship are only beginning to reopen.

Add to this the isolation and other difficulties of lockdown and the healing process of normal grieving has, perhaps, been put 'on hold'; just too much to deal with at this time. A loss which is totally personal seems to have been caught up in the great tide of loss and grief which is sweeping our country, taking away its unique individuality, making it feel like just another statistic.

## **Each is individual, a person with a story, family, friends, connections and memories**

We have been reminded tirelessly, by health professionals, *that no death is a mere statistic*. Each is an individual, a person with a story, family, friends, connections and memories. Indeed, this is the source of the pain that we know as grief or bereavement.

Feelings of loss are often closely interwound with experiences of love; the more we have loved, the greater the sense of loss. We need time and space to acknowledge the reality of our loss, to endure the avalanche of symptoms of grief which can be physical (such as stomach cramps and insomnia), psychological (such as intense sadness, tiredness and depression) and spiritual (such as loss of personal meaning, purpose and sense of how I fit into the world).

These symptoms descend in no predictable timeframe or order, often when and how you least expect them, so that some people have said, "It feels like you're going mad." The reassurance is that you are not losing your mind; these are normal manifestations of grief.

## **Grief has been frozen, put on ice**

Grief encountered during the coronavirus pandemic can be even more complicated because it has somehow been "frozen," put on ice.

As we emerge from lockdown and the ice begins to melt, like numbed hands returning indoors on a winter's day, the pain of grief may begin to intensify. It will set its own agenda.

## **What can we do to offer comfort, warmth and hospitality?**

Coming in from the cold of a bleak winter's day is perhaps an analogy for the place that family members, neighbors and work colleagues, who have lost someone dear to them in the last 3 months, will find themselves.

The setting seems familiar and yet, bewilderingly, everything has changed. What can we do to offer them comfort, warmth and hospitality?

## **It is time to step up and be there for those we know who are suffering from loss at this time**

Bereaved people sometimes notice how people cross the street rather than face that awkward moment of talking to them. "I just don't know what to say" is generally the reason given. As we emerge from this pandemic, with so many bereaved, and counselling services already stretched, it is time for us to step up and be there for the people we know who are suffering from loss at this time.

Bereaved people tell us that it is not so important for you to find exactly the right words, rather that you acknowledge their loss in a genuine way. They may not want you to say much at all, simply your presence, your willingness to be with them, if only for a minute or two, to share something of their pain.

Rather than talking, they might prefer you to listen, to hear the story that they need to retell, over and over, in order to heal. Allow them to talk about their loved one and try to mention him or her by name yourself, share your own personal remembrance of that person where it is affirming and helpful. This is what keeps their memory alive. Someone said, "Coming to terms with loss is not about leaving loved ones behind, it is bringing their memory with you into the life that you continue to lead."

## **Offers of practical help are a good way to show a grieving friend that they are not forgotten**

Keep in touch; do not wait for a person who is grieving to call you. A brief phone call to see how they are may be appreciated but give them the opportunity to tell you if they would prefer you not to call again.

Similarly, offers of practical help are a good way to show a person who feels lost in grief that they are not forgotten. Small acts of kindness, like a card through the door, a home-made cake, companionship on a walk or promise of prayers, often mean more than you can imagine.



## **Often just being there is enough**

Try not to offer advice, to attempt to "fix" their problems or offer platitudes to help them feel better; though it is tempting. Do not be too quick to make efforts to cheer them up when tears flow. Rather, follow their lead in the conversation and allow them to tell you how things really are for them.

The situation may be different from one meeting to another because of the intense waves of emotion such as anger, guilt and sadness that accompany grief. Sometimes it may seem like they are going backwards or round in circles; this is normal, the grieving process is not linear.

Gently reassure them that they are not going mad but, if you do sense serious problems, encourage them to seek professional help. Being with another person, listening in an open and non-judgmental way can help them to work through some of these feelings for themselves. Where you can, allow silent pauses; these give the other person time to think. Often just being there is enough.

## **Commit to being there for the long haul**

Bereavement is normal and grief takes time. Grief from this pandemic may take much longer to begin to heal than we think. Try not to expect your family or friends to be over it and back to normal after a few months. Accept that these losses have changed their lives forever and it is going to take time to adjust. Commit to being there for them for the long haul. Do whatever you can, but don't take on more than you can or you will not be able stay the course.

Take care of yourself, because helping to carry the burden of grief for another person is uncomfortable, heavy and tiring – there is no other way. Take time to relax, to breathe, to exercise, to do something each day that gives you joy. This is not self-indulgence, it is the sensible way to be kind to yourself so that you can continue to be with grieving friends in a compassionate and meaningful way.

*While this guide provides many options and choices for various aspects of Catholic funerals, none of these lists are meant to be exhaustive. Rather, they can provide a few options or serve as inspiration as you make decisions that best honor your loved one and their life. This document is intended for families who wish to gather in person or remotely to commemorate the life of someone they have lost. It provides a step by step guide for a prayer service families and loved ones can utilize.*

## OPTIONS FOR OPENING PRAYER

There are many options for an opening prayer as you remember your loved one. It is important to consider the person's life as a whole as you choose your opening prayer.

### Option 1

Lord our God,  
the death of our brother/sister *Name*.  
recalls our human condition  
and the brevity of our lives on earth.  
But for those who believe in your love  
death is not the end,  
nor does it destroy the bonds  
that you forge in our lives.  
We share the faith of your Son's disciples  
and the hope of the children of God.  
Bring the light of Christ's Resurrection  
to this time of testing and pain  
as we pray for *Name* and for those who love  
him (her).  
Through Christ our Lord.  
Amen.

### Option 2

O God, glory of the faithful and life of the just,  
by the Death and Resurrection of whose Son  
we have been redeemed,  
look mercifully on your departed servant *Name*,  
that, just as he (she) professed  
the mystery of our resurrection,  
so he (she) may merit to receive  
the joys of eternal happiness.  
Through Christ our Lord.  
Amen.

### Option 3

To you, O God, the dead do not die,  
and in death our life is changed, not ended.  
Hear our prayers  
and command the soul of your servant *Name*  
to dwell with Abraham, your friend,  
and be raised at last on the great day of judgment.  
In your mercy cleanse him (her) of any sin  
which he (she) may have committed through  
human frailty.  
Through Christ our Lord.  
Amen.

### Option 4

Grant, we pray, almighty God,  
that the soul of your servant *Name*,  
who for the love of Christ walked the way of  
perfect charity,  
may rejoice in the coming of your glory  
and together with his brothers (her sisters)  
may delight in the everlasting happiness of your  
Kingdom.  
Through Christ our Lord.  
Amen.

### Option 5

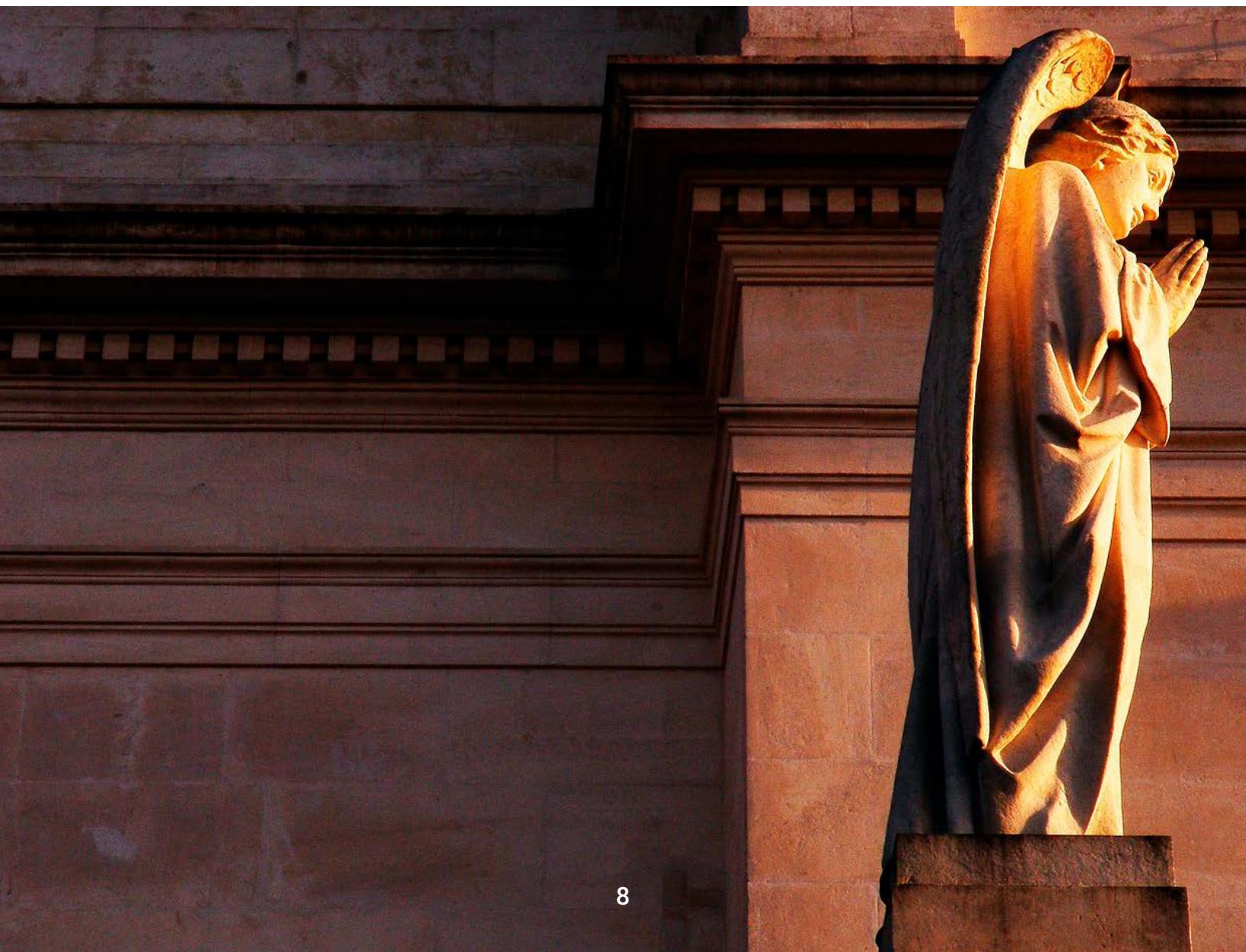
O God, who direct our life in all its moments,  
we humbly entrust to you this your servant *Name*,  
whom we mourn as one whose life  
was completed in so short a time;  
grant that he (she) may flourish, forever young,  
in the happiness of your house.  
Through Christ our Lord.  
Amen.

## **Option 6**

God of our ancestors in faith,  
by the covenant made on Mount Sinai  
you taught your people to strengthen the bonds  
of family  
through faith, honor, and love.  
Look kindly upon *Name*,  
a father (mother) who sought to bind his (her)  
children to you.  
Bring him (her) one day to our heavenly home  
where the Saints dwell in blessedness and peace.  
Through Christ our Lord.  
Amen.

## **Option 7**

God of endless ages,  
from one generation to the next  
you have been our refuge and strength.  
Before the mountains were born  
or the earth came to be,  
you are God.  
Have mercy now on your servant *Name*  
whose long life was spent in your service.  
Give him (her) a place in your Kingdom,  
where hope is firm for all who love  
and rest is sure for all who serve.  
Through Christ our Lord.  
Amen.



## OPTIONS FOR MUSIC

As you gather to remember your loved one, consider playing one of these songs, many of which are available via YouTube or the publisher's website.

### Psalms

- ✚ Psalm 23: "Shepherd Me, O God" or "The Lord is My Shepherd" (Crandall)
- ✚ Psalm 25: "I Lift Up My Soul" (T. Manion)
- ✚ Psalm 27: "The Lord is My Light" (C. Walker) or "The Goodness of the Lord" (S. Soper)
- ✚ Psalm 116: "In the Presence of God" (Kendzia)

### Opening/Closing Hymns

- ✚ "City of God"
- ✚ "How Can I Keep From Singing"
- ✚ "On Eagle's Wings"
- ✚ "Sing with All the Saints in Glory"
- ✚ "Here I Am, Lord"
- ✚ "You Are Mine"
- ✚ "Ave Maria"
- ✚ "Be Not Afraid"
- ✚ "Blest Are They"

### Communion Hymns

A song in the opening/closing category can be used here, or something more specific to Communion, such as:

- ✚ "Gift of Finest Wheat"
- ✚ "Here at This Table"
- ✚ "Table of Plenty"
- ✚ "You Are Our Living Bread"
- ✚ "Unless a Grain of Wheat"
- ✚ "I Am the Bread of Life"



## OPTIONS FOR READINGS

As Catholics, we turn to Scripture for strength in time of grief.  
Choose a reading to share as you reflect on the loved one you have lost.

### Wisdom 3:1-9

#### A reading from the Book of Wisdom

The souls of the just are in the hand of God,  
and no torment shall touch them.  
They seemed, in the view of the foolish, to be dead;  
and their passing away was thought an affliction  
and their going forth from us, utter destruction.  
But they are in peace.  
For if before men, indeed, they be punished,  
yet is their hope full of immortality;  
Chastised a little, they shall be greatly blessed,  
because God tried them  
and found them worthy of himself.  
As gold in the furnace, he proved them,  
and as sacrificial offerings he took them to  
himself.  
In the time of their visitation they shall shine,  
and shall dart about as sparks through stubble;  
They shall judge nations and rule over peoples,  
and the LORD shall be their King forever.  
Those who trust in him shall understand truth,  
and the faithful shall abide with him in love:  
Because grace and mercy are with his holy ones,  
and his care is with the elect.

### Isaiah 25:6a, 7-9

#### A reading from the Book of the Prophet Isaiah

On this mountain the LORD of hosts  
will provide for all peoples.  
On this mountain he will destroy  
the veil that veils all peoples,  
The web that is woven over all nations;  
he will destroy death forever.  
The Lord GOD will wipe away  
the tears from all faces;

The reproach of his people he will remove  
from the whole earth; for the LORD has spoken.  
On that day it will be said:  
"Behold our God, to whom we looked to save us!"  
This is the LORD for whom we looked;  
let us rejoice and be glad that he has saved us!"

### Romans 5:17-21

#### A reading from the Letter of Saint Paul to the Romans

Brothers and sisters:  
If, by the transgression of the one person,  
death came to reign through that one,  
how much more will those who receive the  
abundance of grace  
and of the gift of justification  
come to reign in life through the one person  
Jesus Christ.  
In conclusion, just as through one transgression  
condemnation came upon all,  
so through one righteous act,  
acquittal and life came to all.  
For just as through the disobedience of the one  
man  
the many were made sinners,  
so through the obedience of the one  
the many will be made righteous.  
The law entered in so that transgression might  
increase  
but, where sin increased, grace overflowed all  
the more, so that,  
as sin reigned in death,  
grace also might reign through justification for  
eternal life  
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

## **Romans 8:31b-35, 37-39**

### **A reading from the Letter of Saint Paul to the Romans**

Brothers and sisters:

If God is for us, who can be against us?  
He who did not spare his own Son  
but handed him over for us all,  
will he not also give us everything else along  
with him?  
Who will bring a charge against God's chosen  
ones?  
It is God who acquits us.  
Who will condemn?  
It is Christ Jesus who died, rather, was raised,  
who also is at the right hand of God,  
who indeed intercedes for us.  
What will separate us from the love of Christ?  
Will anguish, or distress, or persecution, or famine,  
or nakedness, or peril, or the sword?  
No, in all these things we conquer overwhelmingly  
through him who loved us.

For I am convinced that neither death, nor life,  
nor angels, nor principalities,  
nor present things, nor future things,  
nor powers, nor height, nor depth,  
nor any other creature will be able to separate us  
from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

## **GOSPEL READINGS**

### **Matthew 5:1-12a**

#### **A reading from the holy Gospel according to Matthew**

When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up the mountain,  
and after he had sat down, his disciples came to him.

He began to teach them, saying:

"Blessed are the poor in spirit,  
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are they who mourn,  
for they will be comforted.

Blessed are the meek,  
for they will inherit the land.

Blessed are they who hunger and thirst for  
righteousness,  
for they will be satisfied.

Blessed are the merciful,  
for they will be shown mercy.

Blessed are the clean of heart,  
for they will see God.

Blessed are the peacemakers,  
for they will be called children of God.

Blessed are they who are persecuted for the sake  
of righteousness,  
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are you when they insult you and  
persecute you  
and utter every kind of evil against you falsely  
because of me.

Rejoice and be glad,  
for your reward will be great in heaven."

## **Luke 23:33, 39-43**

### **A reading from the holy Gospel according to Luke**

When the soldiers came to the place called the Skull,  
they crucified him and the criminals there,  
one on his right, the other on his left.

Now one of the criminals hanging there  
reviled Jesus, saying,  
"Are you not the Christ?  
Save yourself and us."

The other man, however, rebuking him, said in reply,  
"Have you no fear of God,

for you are subject to the same condemnation?

And indeed, we have been condemned justly,  
for the sentence we received corresponds to  
our crimes,  
but this man has done nothing criminal."

Then he said,  
"Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom."  
He replied to him,  
"Amen, I say to you,  
today you will be with me in Paradise."

## John 5:24-29

### A reading from the holy Gospel according to John

Jesus answered the Jews and said to them:  
"Amen, amen, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes in the one who sent me has eternal life and will not come to condemnation, but has passed from death to life.

Amen, amen, I say to you, the hour is coming and is now here when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live. For just as the Father has life in himself, so also he gave to his Son the possession of life in himself. And he gave him power to exercise judgment, because he is the Son of Man. Do not be amazed at this, because the hour is coming in which all who are in the tombs will hear his voice and will come out, those who have done good deeds to the resurrection of life, but those who have done wicked deeds to the resurrection of condemnation."

*This is an appropriate time to share stories about your loved one.*



## OPTIONS FOR PETITIONS

Again and again, we implore our loving God to hear and answer our prayer.  
As you celebrate the life of your loved one, consider sharing these prayers of petitions.

- + Word of God who delivered us from the fear of death:

*Lord, have mercy.*

*Lord, have mercy.*

- + Lord Jesus, you bless those who mourn and are in pain. Bless *N.*'s family and friends who gather around him (her) today:

*Lord, have mercy.*

- + Lord Jesus, gentle Shepherd who brings rest to our souls, give peace to *Name* forever:

*Lord, have mercy.*

*Lord, have mercy.*

- + For *Name* who lived a Christian life, and cared for others in every capacity. May he (she) be held now, forever, in God's loving embrace. We pray to the Lord.

*Lord, hear our prayer.*

- + In Baptism, *Name* received the light of Christ. Scatter the darkness now and lead him/her over the waters of death. We pray to the Lord.

*Lord, hear our prayer*

- + For all whom *Name* leaves behind. May we find delight in his memories as we comfort one another.

We pray to the Lord.

*Lord, hear our prayer.*

- + For all those who have gone before us, both family and friends. May *Name* now be united with them and may they dwell together, forever in the house of the Lord. We pray to the Lord.

*Lord, hear our prayer.*

- + For what else shall we pray... (*allow those who have gathered to share their intentions*)

*Lord, hear our prayer.*

## OPTIONS FOR CLOSING PRAYER

As we conclude our prayer service, let us collect all our prayers into one.  
Choose the closing prayer you think most appropriate.

### Option 1

Lord Jesus, our Redeemer,  
you willingly gave yourself up to death,  
so that all might be saved and pass from death  
to life.  
We humbly ask you to comfort your servants in  
their grief  
and to receive *Name* into the arms of your mercy.  
You alone are the Holy One,  
you are mercy itself;  
by dying you unlocked the gates of life  
for those who believe in you.  
Forgive *Name* his (her) sins,  
and grant him (her) a place of happiness,  
light, and peace  
in the kingdom of your glory for ever and ever.  
Amen.

### Option 2

Lord our God,  
the death of our brother (sister) *Name*  
recalls our human condition  
and the brevity of our lives on earth.  
But for those who believe in your love  
death is not the end,  
nor does it destroy the bonds  
that you forge in our lives.  
We share the faith of your Son's disciples  
and the hope of the children of God.  
Bring the light of Christ's resurrection  
to this time of testing and pain  
as we pray for *Name* and for those who love  
him (her).  
Through Christ our Lord.  
Amen.

### Option 3

Most merciful God,  
whose wisdom is beyond our understanding,  
surround the family of *Name* with your love,  
that they may not be overwhelmed by their loss,  
but have confidence in your goodness,  
and strength to meet the days to come.  
Through Christ our Lord.  
Amen.

### Option 4

Lord God,  
you are attentive to the voice of our pleading.  
Let us find in your Son  
comfort in our sadness,  
certainty in our doubt,  
and courage to live through this hour.  
Make our faith strong  
through Christ our Lord.  
R. Amen.



*While this resource is intended to help families mourn the loss and celebrate the life of a loved one, nothing can substitute for the beautiful ritual of a Catholic funeral liturgy. Families are encouraged to connect with their parishes when the time is appropriate to schedule the Rite of Christian Funerals with family and friends.*



[www.bridgeportdiocese.org/cemeteries/home](http://www.bridgeportdiocese.org/cemeteries/home)

## SOURCES:

- "How to be with grieving friends as we come out of lockdown," by *The Art of Dying Well*
- "Vigil for the Deceased" and "Readings for the Order of Christian Funerals" by *iBreviary*
- "Funeral Music Suggestions" by Our Lady of Guadalupe Catholic Parish
- "Music for a Catholic Funeral" by Parish of the Holy Eucharist



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