



What ever happened to Vigils and the Rosary at Vigils (wakes)?

As the Church's rich history and tradition teaches us, the *vigil* for the deceased is the principal rite celebrated by the Christian community in the time following death and before the funeral liturgy, or if there is no funeral liturgy, before the rite of committal (burial). At the vigil, the Christian community keeps watch with the family in prayer to the God of mercy and finds strength in Christ's presence. It is the first occasion among the funeral rites for the solemn reading of the Word of God. In this time of loss, the family and community turn to God's Word as the source of faith and hope, as light and life in the face of darkness and despair. Consoled by the redeeming Word of God, and by the abiding presence of Christ and the Holy Spirit, the assembly at the vigil calls upon the Father of mercy to receive the deceased into the kingdom of light and peace.

Over the past few decades, recitation of the rosary became the norm for many at a wake, because many of the local church lacked a clear plan or practice for communal gatherings to recite prayers before the funeral Mass. Before World War II, funeral homes were rare, and most families washed and dressed their beloved, deceased relative (as best they could) and placed them either in a freshly made bed or in a pine box stretched across the kitchen chairs. Typically, neighbors would visit and family members traveled long distances to mourn and attend the vigil and/or funeral.

In the Catholic Church, we believe that all who die in God's grace and friendship, but still are imperfectly purified, are indeed assured of their eternal salvation; but after death they undergo purification, so as to achieve the holiness necessary to enter the joy of heaven. The Church prays that no one should be lost and therefore offers its prayers for the dead (during the vigil, rosary, and funeral Mass, for example), so that they may receive the mercy of God and rest in eternal peace.

Over the past few decades, the vigil or wake, evolved and formed the model for the American experience; becoming a domestic affair. Today, in a family that routinely prays the rosary together or if the deceased had a devotion to the Blessed Mother and loved the rosary form of prayer, it is be most appropriate to integrate this devotion into the vigil liturgy. However, while some Catholics cherish the rosary, many do not. The rosary is a sacramental and a private, devotional prayer and not intended to be a substitute for the liturgy. It is important to note that the rosary is secondary to the vigil liturgy and the rich selection of prescribed ritual, scriptural texts, and hymns offered in the Church's Order of Christian Funerals.

If you have any further questions, we invite you to visit the parish's website (www.avemariaonline.org) and check out the "Funeral Liturgies and Etiquette Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)" and the "Funeral and Vigil Planning Handbook" or contact Fr. Don or Fr. Bob.