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**LEX ORANDI, LEX CREDENDI:
ESCHATOLOGICAL TEACHINGS IN THE PRAYERS OF A FUNERAL MASS**

Carolyn Lewis

In Adam I fell, in Adam I was cast out of Paradise, in Adam I died; how shall the Lord call me back, except He find me in Adam; guilty as I was in him, so now justified in Christ.¹

1. Introduction

The heart of the Christian message is bound up in the eschatological expectations of the next life. However, in the day-to-day practice of faith in an increasingly secular society, it is perhaps inevitable that the overwhelming significance of the next life will be most apparent and confronting, particularly for the laity, when faced with the reality of death and grief. The Funeral Mass, therefore, is a delicate balance between comforting the mourner and gentle eschatological catechesis. Yet none of this must overshadow the primary function of the Funeral: to offer the Mass for the repose of the soul of the deceased. Funeral Masses, therefore, are characterized by an awareness of the paradox of the “sure and certain hope”² of salvation, tempered by fervent prayers for mercy.

Hope, in the common consciousness, seems to speak only of positive teleology. However, it should be noted that hope, by definition, in fact encompasses a seemingly paradoxical desire for Heaven together with the fear of offending God: on the one hand, it is the “confident expectation of divine blessing and the beatific vision of God; it is also the fear of offending God’s love and of incurring punishment.”³

¹ Ambrose of Milan, “On the Decease of His Brother Satyrus, Book II: On the Belief in the Resurrection,” in *Ambrose: Select Works and Letters*, ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace (Grand Rapids, Michigan: WM. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1886), sec. 6.

² Cf. Heb 6:11 (NRSVCE).

³ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2nd ed. (Homebush, NSW: St Paul’s, 1997), 2090.

The Second Vatican Council called for revisions to the Mass for the Dead,⁴ resulting in a series of modifications of the prayers, format, and readings. Eamon Duffy's reflection on these changes is bleak: he suggests that the new rites "represent a sanitising and impoverishment of the liturgy of the dead, an emptying out of the complexity and depth it needs to possess."⁵ Nevertheless, these are the rites with which twenty-first century Catholics are now familiar. A return to the *Vetus Ordo* would not provide complexity and depth because the old rites are no longer an accessible element of Catholic ritual consciousness. While much has been lost from the liturgical tradition of the old Requiem Mass, the Masses for the Dead nevertheless reveal the complexity of Catholic eschatology.

This paper will analyse the prayers of the Catholic Funeral Mass, including the Propers and Prefaces. In so doing, it will be demonstrated that a Funeral does indeed provide the opportunity for deepening one's understanding of Christ's role in our redemption, the nature of the afterlife, and the necessity of God's mercy for our salvation. This should lead to greater reflection on the paradoxical relationship between the "sure and certain hope" in salvation and the inextricable necessity to pray for the dead.

2. Christocentric Eschatology

Christian eschatology is embedded in the person of Jesus Christ, since "he was a man who did the will of the Father perfectly, and who thus achieved the end for which human beings were created. In this sense, his whole life was eschatological."⁶ The Funeral Mass places Christ at the centre of its eschatological teachings since it is in Christ that redemption is possible and in the Resurrected Christ that we find hope for our own resurrection, "for if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his."⁷ Focus on the paschal mystery, Christ in the Real Presence in the Eucharist, and Christ as saviour

⁴ Second Vatican Council, "Dogmatic Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 4 December 1963." In *Vatican Council II: The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents*, ed. Austin Flannery (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1975), SC. sec. 81 (hereafter cited as SC).

⁵ Eamon Duffy, "An Apology for Grief, Fear and Anger," in *Faith of Our Fathers* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), 119.

⁶ Jerry L. Walls, "Introduction," in *The Oxford Handbook of Eschatology*, ed. Jerry L. Walls (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 5.

⁷ Rom 6:5.

– particularly by atonement and exaltation⁸ – are all evident in the Propers and Prefaces of the Mass.

The liturgical revisions that followed the Second Vatican Council led to a stronger focus on the Easter mysteries in the context of the Funeral Mass. This aligns with the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, in which it was stated that “[t]he rite for the burial of the dead should express more clearly the paschal character of Christian death.”⁹ A symbolic example of this revitalized Paschal and Christocentric focus is the placement of the Paschal candle beside the coffin.¹⁰ This emphasizes Christocentric eschatology in the Funeral, since it is in Christ that we are redeemed and hope for our salvation.

The prayers of the Mass return, time and again, to the Paschal mysteries. The Eucharist itself, “in which the Lord’s obedience on the Cross embraces us all, purifies us and draws us into the perfect worship offered by Jesus Christ.”¹¹ By the very nature of the Mass and the Eucharist, “Christ himself, living and glorious, is present in a true, real, and substantial manner.”¹² The Eucharist and the whole Order of the Mass are familiar and reassuring, so that they provide comfort, while also enabling the congregation to come to a “heightened awareness of the eschatological dimension”¹³ by offering a foretaste of Heaven.

The significance and efficacy of this sacrament are particularly evident in the Prayers After Communion. For the deceased, the strength they have gained from the sacrament during their life is reflected in the petition “mercifully grant that, strengthened by [the Sacrament of Christ’s body], our brother (sister) N. may come to the eternal table of Christ.”¹⁴ Another Prayer after Communion focuses on the grief of the mourners, begging Christ “faithfully to comfort amid the sorrows of this life those whom you have graciously nourished.”¹⁵ Christ’s presence

⁸ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, Fathers of the English Dominican Province (New York: Benziger Brothers, 1947), IIIa Q. 48.

⁹ *SC*, sec. 81.

¹⁰ “Per ciò che attiene, nel nuovo rito delle esequie, la connessione con la Pasqua di Cristo auspicata dal Concilio è stata marcata dalla possibilità di porre accanto al feretro il segno del cero pasquale, oltre alla croce e ai ceri” (Davide Righi, “Il nuovo rito delle esequie della chiesa cattolica latina,” *Ricerche E Progetti Per Il Territorio, La Città E l’architettura* 8 (12), no. 12 (10 July 2018): 55).

¹¹ Benedict XVI, *Jesus of Nazareth: Holy Week* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2011), 235.

¹² *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1413.

¹³ Bruce T. Morrill, *Divine Worship and Human Healing: Liturgical Theology at the Margins of Life and Death*, (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2009), 234.

¹⁴ “Prayer after Communion, Masses for the Dead: For The Funeral (A) Outside Easter Time,” *The Roman Missal*, 3rd ed. (London: Catholic Truth Society, 2011), 1435.

¹⁵ “Prayer after Communion, Masses for the Dead: For the Funeral of a Baptized Child,” *The Roman Missal*, 1441.

in the Eucharist, a source of comfort and strength, is central to the Funeral Mass, illustrating the Christocentric eschatological hope for both the departed and those who remain.

The Eucharistic sacrifice is united with the sacrifice of the Cross, by which humanity was redeemed. Unrestricted to the Eucharistic Prayer itself, this is a recurring theme throughout the Funeral Mass. The Prefaces are an important means of communicating teachings about salvation, since “their purpose [is] to bring out more fully the motives for thanksgiving within the Eucharistic Prayer and to set out more clearly the different facets of the mystery of salvation.”¹⁶ Salvation through atonement is therefore encapsulated in the Prefaces in Masses for the Dead.

Sin is the cause of spiritual death,¹⁷ and yet, “just as one man’s trespass led to condemnation for all, so one man’s act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all.”¹⁸ The Catholic hope that underlies not just a Funeral, but the entire faith, is that “when seized by death according to our sins, we are redeemed through Christ’s great victory, and with him called back to life.”¹⁹ It was on the Cross that “as one alone he accepted death, so that we might all escape from dying.”²⁰ Again, our salvation from sin and the eschatological possibility of eternal life is made clear because “he is the salvation of the world, the life of the human race, the resurrection of the dead.”²¹ While each of these quotations comes from a different Preface for the Dead, the message is ultimately clear: that, while sin causes death, Christ gives us the hope of redemption. This is reinforced in the Memorial Acclamations, and by the third in particular: “[s]ave us, Saviour of the world, for by your Cross and Resurrection you have set us free.”²²

Furthermore, the Paschal focus of the Funeral Masses reflects that, in the Resurrection of Christ, humanity is enabled to return to the image and likeness of God. The Resurrection “promises us nothing else than the restoration of the fallen to their ancient state; for the grace we look for is a certain return to the first life, bringing back again to Paradise him who was cast out from it.”²³ The Resurrection of Christ’s human body brings the promise of the resurrection of our own human bodies. During the Easter Season, this belief is still more powerfully

¹⁶ “General Instruction of the Roman Missal,” in *The Roman Missal*, sec. 364.

¹⁷ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1006 and 1874.

¹⁸ Rom 5:18.

¹⁹ “Preface V for the Dead,” *The Roman Missal*, 664.

²⁰ “Preface II for the Dead,” *The Roman Missal*, 658.

²¹ “Preface III for the Dead,” *The Roman Missal*, 660.

²² “Eucharistic Prayer I,” *The Roman Missal*, 674.

²³ Gregory of Nyssa, “On the Making of Man,” in *Gregory of Nyssa: Dogmatic Treatises, etc.*, ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace (Grand Rapids, Michigan: WM. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1893), XVII. 2.

reinforced, since the season offers the opportunity for deeper reflection on the paradox of sorrowful loss with joyful hope. “Just as Jesus died and rose again, so through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep”²⁴ This is also encapsulated in Paul’s Letter to Philemon, which is used as the Communion Antiphon in a number of Masses for the Dead: “[w]e await a saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will change our mortal bodies, to conform with his glorified body.”²⁵ This antiphon, said or sung as the faithful receive the very Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity of Christ, illustrates the hope for the Resurrection with faith in Christ as Saviour.

Already moved by hope and faith, the third theological virtue of love should also prompt the mourners to pray for the eternal reward of the departed. This focus of the Funeral Mass, prayer for the dead, is pre-empted in the Collects: “as our faith in your Son, raised from the dead, is deepened, may our hope of Resurrection for your departed servant N. also find new strength,”²⁶ and “may [N.] be taken up into glory with your Son.”²⁷ Thus, the praxis of eschatological hope is made evident in the Christocentric teachings regarding the Eucharist and salvation.

3. The Nature of the Afterlife

In praying for the repose of the souls of the departed, we are encouraged to reflect on the nature of the afterlife. Throughout Scripture, the parables in particular, we come to an understanding of the nature of the afterlife in which “each will be rewarded immediately after death in accordance with his works and faith.”²⁸ For the good and just, there will be the eternal reward of Heaven. For those who reject God’s friendship, there will be eternal damnation. It is at the time of a Funeral, in the face of death, that many Christians become most acutely aware of this eschatological destiny. Masses for the Dead direct their focus towards hope for Heaven, tempered by a fear of God’s judgement.

²⁴ “Entrance Antiphon, Masses for the Dead: For the Funeral (C) During Easter Time,” *The Roman Missal*, 1438.

²⁵ “Communion Antiphon, Masses for the Dead: For the Funeral (B) Outside Easter Time,” *The Roman Missal*, 1438.

²⁶ “Collect, Masses for the Dead: For the Funeral (C) During Easter Time,” *The Roman Missal*, 1438.

²⁷ “Prayer over the Offerings, Masses for the Dead: For the Funeral (C) During Easter Time,” *The Roman Missal*, 1439.

²⁸ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1021.

Heaven is the object of Christian hope: this is the gift of salvation for which we strive to live a Christian life. It encompasses the paradox of “already and not yet:” it is promised and given, but not yet attained. The Eucharist provides a foretaste of this place of light and eternal friendship with God, where “the multitude of those gathered around Jesus and Mary ... forms the Church of Heaven where in eternal beatitude they see God as He is.”²⁹ The prayers with Heaven draw particularly on the depictions found in the Book of Revelation: “the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and his servants will worship him; they will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. And there will be no more night; they need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they will reign forever and ever.”³⁰

A Funeral Mass, rather than a non-Eucharistic memorial service, is important to the Catholic understanding of eschatology, since the Eucharist itself is in some way the anticipation of Heaven, the “pledge of future glory.” In the Eucharist, everything speaks of confident waiting “in joyful hope for the coming of our Saviour, Jesus Christ.”³¹ Through the teachings about Heaven that are reinforced in the Funeral, a greater understanding of joyful Christian hope should inspire the faithful to pray that the departed will be able to share in that reward.

The prayers of the Funeral recall Heaven as a place for the pure to dwell in perfect friendship with God. A sense of homecoming and welcome is elicited through these prayers that the deceased “may be led to our true homeland”³² where “perpetual light [may] shine upon them, with your Saints forever.”³³ Images of a “dwelling place of light and peace”³⁴ evoke tranquil domesticity and the sense of belonging is reinforced in the *Sanctus*, sung “in company with the choirs of Angels.”³⁵

Reminders of the eternal nature of Heaven, in conjunction with images of homecoming, also encourage Christian hope. From the beginning of the Mass, the options for the Collect highlight the eschatological paradox of life beginning with death, one describing the deceased

²⁹ Paul VI, *Solemni Hac Liturgia*, Apostolic Letter, Vatican website, 30 June 1968, http://www.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/motu_proprio/documents/hf_p-vi_motu-proprio_19680630_credito.html, sec. 29.

³⁰ Rev. 22:3-4.

³¹ John Paul II, *Ecclesia De Eucharistia*, Encyclical Letter, Vatican website, 17 April 2003, http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/special_features/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_20030417_ecclesia_eucharistia_en.html, sec. 18.

³² “Collect, Masses for the Dead: For the Funeral (A) Outside Easter Time,” *The Roman Missal*, 1435.

³³ “Entrance Antiphon, Masses for the Dead: For the Funeral (A) Outside Easter Time,” *The Roman Missal*, 1435.

³⁴ “Prayer After Communion, Masses for the Dead: For the Funeral (C) During Easter Time,” *The Roman Missal*, 1439.

³⁵ “Preface II for the Dead,” *The Roman Missal*, 658.

as “freed from the bonds of mortality,”³⁶ while another prays for “the name of your servant N. to be inscribed in the book of life,”³⁷ and another for their “inheritance of eternal redemption.”³⁸ Meanwhile, the Preface reinforces that “life is changed not ended.”³⁹ This looks forward to the Resurrection of the Dead, when Christ will “change our mortal bodies, to conform with his glorified body.”⁴⁰

These prayers focus very much on hope for the salvation of those who have died, as well as for those who mourn them. An awareness of the need for God’s saving power is at the heart of the Mass. It is worth noting the beauty of the Funeral for a Baptized Child. Since, not having reached the age of reason,⁴¹ they are not stained by personal sin, the focus turns to those who mourn the loss: “grant that one day we may inherit eternal life with him (her).”⁴² Here, there is complete faith in the goodness and mercy of God, united with hope for those who remain.

Yet Heaven is not the only eschatological reality. Hell is the rejection of God’s friendship that leads to eternal, sensible pain.⁴³ It therefore merits consideration as to why the reality of Hell is largely absent from the Funeral Mass. While the threat of damnation is still to be found in some of the options for readings of the Masses for the Dead,⁴⁴ excessive focus on Hell and Judgement, from a pastoral perspective, is often avoided.⁴⁵ Indeed, the *Vetus Ordo* Requiem is often accused of having been so focused on the Cross and Judgement that “the preconiliar Funeral rite conveyed a sense of contrition and fear.”⁴⁶ The exemplar of this sense is often the *Dies Irae*: the sequence which precedes the Gospel.⁴⁷ The liturgical revisions following *Sacrosanctum Concilium*⁴⁸ endeavoured to address such emphasis, so that, while “the Latin

³⁶ “Collect, Masses for the Dead: For the Funeral (B) Outside Easter Time,” *The Roman Missal*, 1437.

³⁷ “Collect, Masses for the Dead: For the Funeral (B) Outside Easter Time,” *The Roman Missal*, 1437.

³⁸ “Collect, Masses for the Dead: For the Funeral (C) During Easter Time,” *The Roman Missal*, 1439.

³⁹ “Preface I for the Dead,” *The Roman Missal*, 656.

⁴⁰ “Communion Antiphon, Masses for the Dead: For the Funeral (B) Outside Easter Time,” *The Roman Missal*, 1438.

⁴¹ Cf. *The Code of Canon Law: in English Translation* (London: Collins, 1983), 97.2.

⁴² “Collect, Masses for the Dead: (E) For the Funeral of a Baptized Child,” *The Roman Missal*, 1441.

⁴³ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1035.

⁴⁴ Examples include: Dan 12:1–3, 1 Jn 3:14–16, Mt 25:1–13, Mt 25:31–46, and Jn 5:24–29.

⁴⁵ Refer to discussion of these issues in Bruce Morrill, “The Order of Christian Funerals: Healing through Hope in Bodily Resurrection,” in *Divine Worship and Human Healing: Liturgical Theology at the Margins of Life and Death* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2009).

⁴⁶ Paul Turner, *Light in the Darkness: Preparing Better Catholic Funerals* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2017), 18.

⁴⁷ The words of the sequence, however, reveal an important understanding of Judgement as a “discussion of merits and the payment of rewards” (Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, IIIa Suppl, q. 89, a. 6.). Its omission from most Funerals can be considered a sad liturgical loss.

⁴⁸ *SC*, sec. 81–82.

version recognizes the reality of judgment, begging God for mercy, deliverance, and pardon . . . [i]n the reformed rite . . . the sadness is poised toward resurrection hope.”⁴⁹

Nevertheless, the reality of Hell in the contemporary Funeral Mass is still evident in the theme of judgement, albeit tempered by hope. Through the prayers for mercy and redemption, we find the implication that there is something from which to be saved. Scott Hahn suggests that the Real Presence and foretaste of the Heavenly Banquet mean that “we stand before the judgement seat whenever we approach Heaven, as we do at every Mass.”⁵⁰ Yet that reminder of judgement comes to us when we receive the great strength of, and hope promised in, the Eucharist.

Beyond the options for the readings, the clearest reference to judgement in the Propers of the Funeral Mass is in the Prayer over the Offerings. Here, it is prayed that the deceased “may find in [the Lord] a merciful Judge,”⁵¹ acknowledging human frailty in the request to “wash away, we pray, in the Blood of Christ, the sins of your departed servant N.”⁵² These prayers “take a humble, realistic approach to assessing the moral life of the deceased and the seriousness of God’s judgement.”⁵³ This approach is sustained through the Order of the Mass, including the *Pater Noster*: “[f]orgive us our trespasses.”⁵⁴ The Propers of the Funeral should enable the faithful to reflect more deeply on the significance of one of the most familiar prayers of the Christian tradition.

Ultimately, despite the eschatological realities of Catholic teaching on Hell, the Funeral maintains the theme of hope. This is because “faith in the Last Judgement is first and foremost hope – the need for which was made abundantly clear in the upheavals of recent centuries.”⁵⁵ Teachings about judgement, therefore, inspire hope for salvation. This fervent hope for eternal life in Heaven drives the most crucial element of the Funeral Mass: prayer for the dead.

⁴⁹ Michael Witczak, “Toward the Paschal Mystery: The Evolving Roman Catholic Funeral Liturgy,” *Liturgy* 33(1), no. 1 (January 2018): 8, <https://doi.org/10.1080/0458063X.2017.1375796>.

⁵⁰ Scott Hahn, *The Lamb’s Supper: Mass as Heaven on Earth* (New York: Image, 1999), 112.

⁵¹ “Prayer over the Offerings, Masses for the Dead: (D) Other Prayers for the Funeral Mass,” *The Roman Missal*, 1440.

⁵² “Prayer over the Offerings, Masses for the Dead: (D) Other Prayers for the Funeral Mass,” *The Roman Missal*, 1440.

⁵³ Paul Turner, *Light in the Darkness*, 43.

⁵⁴ “The Communion Rite,” *The Roman Missal*, 698.

⁵⁵ Benedict XVI, *Spe Salvi*, Encyclical Letter, Vatican website, 30 November 2007, http://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_ben-xvi_enc_20071130_spe-salvi.html, sec. 43.

4. God's Mercy and Atonement for Sin

Reminded by the Church's eschatological teachings through the funeral prayers, with an awareness of sin and its consequences, the faithful pray for God's mercy. Knowledge of human frailty inspires prayer for the dead, a custom at the heart of many elements of Catholic practice, including All Souls' Day, the customary prayers for Holy Souls in November, prayers for the dead in the petitions during Vespers, as well as the prayers of the Funeral Mass. Prayer for the dead is a prayer for their entry into the Beatific Vision, illustrating the great hope that is central to teachings on Purgatory.

The fictional soul in Cardinal Newman's *Dream of Gerontius* illustrates the beauty of hope for God's mercy amid the deprivation of the Beatific Vision:

There let me be
And there in hope the lone night-watches keep,
Told out for me.
There motionless and happy on my pain,
Lone, not forlorn, –
there will I sing my sad perpetual strain,
Until the morn.⁵⁶

Purgatory allows for a final purification of the soul before entering into the Beatific Vision.⁵⁷ Praying for the eternal repose for others is “relational conduct proper to the members of the Body of Christ.”⁵⁸ As members of the Church, it is a fitting act of charity to pray for the repose of the dead, especially since Christian hope is the hope for the salvation of all.⁵⁹

Therefore, in hopeful humility, the prayers of the Funeral recognise the need for God's mercy. It is acknowledged that “by our own fault we perish,”⁶⁰ and that it is God alone “whose

⁵⁶ John Henry Newman, “The Dream of Gerontius,” in *The Dream of Gerontius and Meditations on the Stations of the Cross: Newman's Meditations on The Last Things*, ed. Cameron M. Thompson (St. Paul & Minneapolis, MN: Acropolis Scholars, LLC, 2019), Chapter 6.

⁵⁷ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1032.

⁵⁸ Anthony Kelly, “6. Purgatory,” in *Eschatology and Hope* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2006), 120.

⁵⁹ Refer to *Spe Salvi*, sec. 28.

⁶⁰ “Preface V for the Dead,” *The Roman Missal*, 664.

nature is always to forgive and show mercy,”⁶¹ “able to give life after death.”⁶² These prayers are also echoed in the Order of the Mass, during the *Kyrie*⁶³ and *Agnus Dei*.⁶⁴

The acknowledgement of the importance of God’s mercy in salvation is directed towards the departed. The Collect for a Funeral outside Easter time prays “mercifully grant that, through this mystery, your servant N ... may rise to rejoice again.”⁶⁵ As Leo XIII wrote, the Eucharistic sacrifice is an important intercessory offering on behalf of the dead: “the souls detained in Purgatory are benefited by the prayers of the faithful, and especially by the august Sacrifice of the Altar.”⁶⁶ The Prayer Over the Offerings offers “these sacrificial offerings, O Lord, for the salvation of your servant N,”⁶⁷ or “this sacrifice of conciliation, so that, should any stain of sin have clung to him (her) or any human fault have affected him (her), it may, by your loving gift, be forgiven and wiped away.”⁶⁸ The Eucharist as a foretaste of Heaven is also recalled in the Prayer After Communion, in the supplication “mercifully grant that, strengthened by [the Sacrament of Christ’s body], our brother (sister) N. may come to the eternal table of Christ.”⁶⁹ The sacrament, both as a sacrifice and as a source of spiritual strength, is made apparent as it is offered for the response of the soul of the deceased.

A final comment on the mercy of God towards unbaptized infants should be made. This is one of the eschatological questions on which the Church is quietest. While the idea of “limbo” has certainly enjoyed popularity in theological discourse, the Church merely teaches that she “can only entrust [children who have died without Baptism] to the mercy of God.”⁷⁰ This is certainly reflected in the *lex orandi* of the Collect: “grant that those you allow to be weighed

⁶¹ “Collect, Masses for the Dead: For the Funeral (A) Outside Easter Time,” *The Roman Missal*, 1435.

⁶² “Collect, Masses for the Dead: For the Funeral (D) Other Prayers for the Funeral Mass,” *The Roman Missal*, 1440.

⁶³ “Penitential Rite,” *The Roman Missal*, 550.

⁶⁴ “Communion Rite,” *The Roman Missal*, 702.

⁶⁵ “Collect, Masses for the Dead: For the Funeral (A) Outside Easter Time,” *The Roman Missal*, 1435.

⁶⁶ Leo XIII, *Quod Anniversarius*, Encyclical Letter, Vatican website, 1 April 1888, http://www.vatican.va/content/leo-xiii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_l-xiii_enc_01041888_quod-anniversarius.html, sec. 7.

⁶⁷ “Prayer over the Offerings, Masses for the Dead: For the Funeral (A) Outside Easter Time,” *The Roman Missal*, 1436.

⁶⁸ “Prayer over the Offerings, Masses for the Dead: For the Funeral (B) Outside Easter Time,” *The Roman Missal*, 1437.

⁶⁹ “Prayer after Communion, Masses for the Dead: For the Funeral (A) Outside Easter Time,” *The Roman Missal*, 1435.

⁷⁰ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1261.

down by their longing for the child taken from them may be raised up by faith to hope in your compassion.”⁷¹ Fervent, humble prayer is most necessary in such circumstances.

5. Contemporary Issues

Funerals are difficult because it is the time when people are confronted with death and the overwhelming theological questions that it entails. The clergy are required to balance the teachings of the Church and the requirements of the Rites with the emotions of the family. Particularly since All Souls’ Day is no longer a holy day of obligation, exposure to the eschatological teachings of the Church, as evident in the Funeral Mass, can be limited, even for practicing Catholics. For those who do not practise, postmodernity provides an overwhelming challenge to Christian eschatology, which is seen as “an imperialistic ideology” that “encourages the violent suppression of dissent.”⁷² A pastoral approach needs to be mindful of this socialized ignorance, avoidance, and even rejection of eschatology.

Secular preparation for Funerals will frequently entail eulogies and even slideshows or videos of the life of the deceased. In some cases, it may be that these eulogies are written with the assumption that the deceased is already in Heaven. This is often because “in the modern era, the idea of the Last Judgement has faded into the background.”⁷³ In these situations, there is a need for clear pastoral guidance from the priest. The selection of the most appropriate Mass for the Dead and of the optional Propers should be done in order to best demonstrate the teachings of the Church so that those who are present may recall both the joy of the promised resurrection and the need for God’s mercy.

6. Conclusion

While the Funeral Mass is certainly vital for comforting those who mourn, far more crucial is the offering of the Eucharistic sacrifice for the soul of the deceased in a manner that meaningfully expresses the complexities of the Christian faith. The clergy should select the

⁷¹ “Collect, Masses for the Dead: (F) For the Funeral of a Child Who Died before Baptism,” *The Roman Missal*, 1443.

⁷² Richard Bauckham, “Conclusion: Emerging Issues in Eschatology in the Twenty-First Century,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Eschatology*, ed. Jerry L. Walls (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 679.

⁷³ Benedict XVI, *Spe Salvi*, 42.

Propers and readings with both catechetical intent and pastoral sensitivity. An analysis of the Funeral Rites provides insight into the hope promised in the salvation won by Jesus Christ, in conjunction with the bitter reality of broken human freedom and the consequences of sin. It is for freedom from these consequences of venial sin that we pray for the deceased. There is not, or at least should not be, any assumption that the deceased is in Heaven: the prayers of the Funeral should remind those mourning of their faith, and so encourage them to pray in hope for the salvation of their loved one, and for all the Faithful Departed. This is the primary purpose of the Masses for the Dead.

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