



Funerals and Family Care in the South African Local Catholic Church

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Abstract

The importance of funerals in South Africa is emphasized in this essay. Specifically, to rebuild the society that was torn apart as a result of the union of numerous families. Only if the family is rebuilt in accordance with God's plan can this take place. Sadly, there are a number of South African societies where the Catholic Church is not respected. The most common topic of conversation in South Africa in both the church and society is death. In South Africa, funerals may at times serve dubious functions. Many nuclear families come together during funerals. To comfort the grieving family, people of many faiths and denominations thus gather together. Surprisingly, the bulk shows up with empty hands and without any supplies to aid the efforts of the struggling family members. Funerals are therefore costly for bereaved families in South Africa, despite the fact that many family members lament their poverty. The majority of those who comfort a grieving family are not particularly inspired by the Christian funeral service. The funeral attendees in South Africa hold both God and the church responsible for the advice they receive as a result of a death. This is due to the fact that people often tend to place a higher value on material wealth than on the spiritual and everlasting aspects that death carries based on the promise of life everlasting by Jesus Christ. The only solution is to achieve a balance between worldly and spiritual richness, which also necessitates increasing awareness of an individuals' spiritual demands and needs.

Keywords: Funerals, local, Catholic Church, family, repair..

Introduction

A song gets South African Catholic Church funerals going with their lively style (Soanes, 2008:32). The goal is to rebuild the broken society, which consists of many families. The family must be rebuilt in accordance with God's plan for it to prevail in tough times. Families in South Africa need to be healed because they are both divine and human. Hence it is the regions/local Catholic Church's duty to help them to do so. The article focuses on the difficulties the local Catholic Church faces while trying to help South African families heal after a death. This includes how the family and society are impacted by the resulting problems they may face. Funeral services bring



together members of various nuclear and extended families as well as people of various religions and denominations. Even though funerals in South Africa are expensive financially speaking, many families lament their lack of resources. The number of people present at funerals often exceeds that of the average church service. For the local Catholic Church in South Africa, the funeral is now a risky endeavour. Funerals are more popular than church events. Most individuals place more value on material wealth than on eternal life in the promised afterlife for God's people. The only way out is to strike a balance between worldly and spiritual requirements, which is what the neighborhood Catholic Church is trying to do by bringing attention to this important and vexing issue. The article uses in-depth research and analysis to examine the societal situation in a South African local parish.

Problem background

Conradie (2002:180) asserts that: "The social agenda of the church in South Africa is already filled to the brim with more challenges than the church has the capacity or the resources to address". Particularly for the black people in South Africa, the funeral is both a blessing and a curse. Funerals are a blessing because they bring people of all ages together. There are people there from all walks of life and faiths. Children, regular adult men and women, and cultural traditional leaders all have different funeral customs in South Africa. For instance, among Northern Sotho-speaking people, old ladies (i.e. first citizen women) and the mother of the sick child bury children inside the home. The young lady, who is only the child's mother, starts to kneel over the grave of her son or daughter. The elderly women then follow her, but they cover the child's grave with a spade. The digging of the child's grave in essence marks the end of the men's work.

Men, especially teen boys, prefer to bury ordinary teenagers and adult men and women at the cemetery early in the morning. The ceremony starts at home and ends at the cemetery. The Moruti or the "*priesta*" leads the prayers at Christian funerals (pastor). The burial society lowers the body into the grave, one keeps saying the funeral prayers at the cemetery, and the adolescent group keeps applying the deceased's covering. Then follow the councilor, burial societies, a traditional leader, and announcements, and later a vote of thanks from the bereaved family who are called to the stage by the master of ceremonies. The final prayer is then offered by the pastor, or, in the case of an ordained priest, the blessing is given.

Traditional leaders' funerals typically begin around 7pm. Typically, men—often members of the royal family—perform burials. A calabash, some water, beer, or a grain of seeds are poured into the grave to symbolize an endlessly continuous life. There is enough food for everyone.. Beef, chicken, rice, and potatoes are all acceptable food choices, as are soft drinks. A funeral has become a challenge in the Catholic Church's family care in South Africa because of all these positive outcomes. The funeral rites in South Africa are comparable to those in Graeco-Roman culture. What sets South African funeral custom apart is the way it spreads the gospel of God.

Graeco-Roman aspects

Graeco-Roman culture is made up of various ethnic groups from various countries and diverse cultures. Their funeral rite incorporates elements from other parts of the modern 'empire' as well



as their ancient heritage. Despite the fact that customs varied greatly from person to person, the funeral rites performed by common Roman citizens were sufficiently common to serve as a model for the type of funeral that first-century Christians would have been familiar with.

Their apprehension appears to have served as the main cultural inspiration for funeral rites, much as in current South Africa. Personal feelings of loss and grief played a role, but pagan rituals at death were motivated by fear more so than by hope or affection. In both Graeco-Roman and South African cultures, it was widely accepted that the dead are prone to resentment and are quick to exact revenge. Funeral rites are meant to calm them. It was believed that burial provided a certain level of peace because, without it, a person's shadow could be destined for an endless state of wandering and terror in the world of the living.

For this reason, in Graeco-Roman culture, the burial of the dead was considered the minimum of ritual care. Even the dead stranger was required to be buried ritually. Both Greek and Roman literature bear to how deeply rooted this notion was in popular religious sentiment. The other major influence of early Christian burial was, of course, its Jewish roots. Through Israel's history, the burial of deceased parishioners has been a duty and a work of mercy. Burial in their own hands (Genesis 23) and with their ancestors (Genesis 49; 50; Joshua 24:32-33) were notable values to patriarchs, judges, and kings (Judges 8:32; 12:7; 16:31; 2 Kings 9:28).

Enemies were also given some form of burial (Joshua 8:29; 10:26; 2 Samuel 21:13-14). The Deuterocanonical *Buh-Tobit* illustrates the importance of this practice in the life of a devout Jew who has been tested and rewarded by God. In post-exilic times, rabbis taught that the duty of caring for the dead extended not only to relatives and friends but to any deceased Jew. They repeatedly emphasized that this duty of brotherly love also includes death outside of Judaism. Jewish funeral rites always reflected the realism and simplicity that characterize today's justification of the court. In fact "during the late republic and throughout the empire... belief in the survival after death of personal individuals it prevailed and views on the nature of the life that awaited the soul beyond the grave were, in the main, optimistic. Both literature (to some extent) and funeral art (to a high degree) do, in fact, reveal that there was in this age a deepening conviction that the terror and power of death could be overcome and that richer, happier, and more godlike life than the experienced here was attainable hereafter, under certain conditions, by the souls of the departed".

Problem statement

Funerals, which are described as "a ceremony in which a dead person is buried or burnt" (Latin: "*Funeralia*"), have become contentious in South Africa rather than being a family-centered service in a nearby Catholic Church. Family members in South Africa are not psychologically free due to their obsession with funerals. Even individuals who are planning funerals for members of their immediate biological family, such as children, parents, and grandparents, find themselves virtually swamped. Some would view this as a blessing for the growth of the burial (funeral) societies. The majority of families, especially Catholic households, prefer burial societies to attend to the dead rather than sacred church services. Funeral groups are clearly viewed by some as being preferable to them rather than ecclesiastical rites like Holy Mass. If they attend church, they would prefer to pay R10.00 for the supplies needed for the Holy Mass, such as hosts, wine, church



utensils (chalice, ciborium), and vestments (altar covers, and so forth), than R100.00 for burial organizations (which could be used to buy a coffin, or a bull, chicken, flour, for eating during the funeral).

Socially, it appears that most South Africans prefer comforting affluent bereaved families because of the big audiences that attend at funerals, and not the poor people's grieving families. Experience has shown that not many people show up for a poor person's funeral from a modest poor household. Members of low-income households may mistakenly see such segregation as a chance to use dishonest and illegal means to amass cash so that their funerals will be held alongside those of others. Such cultural repercussions could easily lead to the abandonment of God by poor people who are supposed to be close to him. Critics can infer from this that the majority of South Africans are more focused on material wealth than on achieving spiritual eternal life as espoused in the Christian churches. The Catholic and other churches face a world where secularism, competing faiths and materialism are depleting the numbers of true Christian believers.

The burial prayer for those who were not baptized was also incorporated by the Pedi Liturgical Commission (PLC) in the *"Puku ya Disakaramente le Ditshegofatso"* in Northern Sotho. It states:

"Morena modimo, o tseba dipelo tsa batho, gomme or rata go di homotsa manyaming a sona. O tseba tumelo ya batswadi ba. Ba lla ka gobane ngwan wa borna a tlogetse leface. A nke ba hwetse kholofelo lesokong la gag oleo le se nago magomo. Ka kriste Morena wa rena. Amen" (Pedi Liturgical Commission, 1999:197). (Literal English translation is: Lord, you know the hearts of people, you have to console them, you know the faith of their parents. They cry because of their child who has passed away from this world. May they get hope from unfinished hope. Through Christ our Lord. Amen).

It is possible that the aforementioned Catholic blessing prayer could be viewed incorrectly as the local Catholic Church is contradicting itself by performing both Catholic Church baptisms and non-baptisms. Such a person can become convinced that what they believe about "the people of God" and what the Catholic Church teaches are compatible. The 1983 Code of Canon Law states that those who are "absorbed into Christ via baptism" are considered to be "people of God" (Can 204 1). It is also possible that in such circumstances, the local Catholic Church in South Africa will readily excuse such individuals for their ignorance of the various forms of baptism practiced by the Catholic Church, including the baptism of desire, the baptism of water (Acts 8:3-39), and the baptism of blood (martyrdom).

However, they may also face difficulties if they are unaware of catechumens who have a specific connection to the church because, when moved by the Holy Spirit, they are expressing a clear desire to be received into the church. They are united to the church, which already values them as its own, by this very desire as well as the life of faith, hope, and charity that they conduct. The church has a special care for those belonging to this classification group. Although Jesus invited them to live a gospel life and initiate them into the celebration of the sacred rites, he granted them various privileges that are exclusive to Christians, including burial. Save in the event that this



happens to one of them before he or she is fully incorporated into the Catholic Church by baptism (Canon 206 § 1, 2).

The local Catholic Church in South Africa can also be guilty and self-contradictory by not taking action to address some of the issues mentioned above. Globally there are also other issues seen by more than half of American pastors as major concern facing the church include: poor discipleship models addressing complex social issues with biblical integrity, prosperity gospel teachings, failure in not reaching a younger audience, and political polarization (Earls, 2020). In South African society, the local Catholic Church is the place of proclamation of the good news of Christ. The church is engaged with presenting the salvation accomplished by Jesus Christ as an integral part and partial of the universal Catholic Church (Rahner, 1975:205). Through its teaching, the local Catholic Church can produce the fruits of justice, forgiveness, respect, dignity, and world peace. It is because of the compassion that is poured into the hearts of all when the Holy Spirit embraces them. The local church's message must aim to penetrate people's emotions and experiences, as well as their lifestyle, culture, and environment (Puebla, 1980:65-66). A Community ministry that is effective can certainly enhances any local community. Love and oneness of the community must be the same as in the community of God. This means the church must make the community a sign and instrument for unity generally speaking. In a mutual process community promotes good church and other leadership and leadership in turn promotes a healthy and good community.

It is a message of an integral and universal Catholic Church. The local church must present the world as the proclamation and the presence of the salvation brought about by Jesus Christ (Rahner, 1975:205) in the context of South Africa. Through the charity that is poured into the hearts of people, the church's teaching can produce the fruits of justice, forgiveness, respect, dignity, and world peace. Furthermore, starting with the individual person, the church's message aims to penetrate human hearts and experiences, as well as lifestyles, cultures, and the environment (Puebla, 1980:65-66). The ministry of good priests and other funeral leaders can make an important contribution to the community-based approach in the South African Catholic Church.

Why Church attendance is vital for Catholics

God commands us that we need to keep the Sabbath day holy Exodus 20:8–11). One of the ways we keep this commandment is for Catholics to congregate on Sundays to worship God and give Him thanks. People are also strengthened when we are around other believers, see their faith, and hear their experiences and testimonies in God's house. The Holy Sacrament is an essential element (Nicolaidis, 2021) and thus it is critically important since the Holy Sacrament helps us remember Jesus as we partake of the sacrament (or Communion). Jesus commanded, "Take, eat: this is my body, which is broken for you: this do in remembrance of me" (1 Corinthians 11:24). Believers need to keep this commandment weekly at church as they remember what Jesus has done for us all and commit to follow Him. After all, the church is compared by the Apostle Paul, to a body, with Jesus as the head. He clearly states that for a body to work, every member is important and must do its part (Ephesians 4:16). Participating in church and offering time and talents helps to improve and strengthen both a believer and the people around him or her. Clearly we also learn at church and she gives us guidance on how to follow God, and improve



our spirituality, and ultimately live better lives. People are uplifted by fellow believers and by the opportunity to serve and worship. You can also feel the Holy Spirit who brings “love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, [and] faith” (Galatians 5:22). Church is a nation of God or community of believers where believers can socialize and support each other and no other is needed (Nicolaides, 2010).

Question, aim, and objectives

The key question that guides this study is how the funeral might be beneficial to the local Catholic Church in South Africa in terms of the human family. Additional questions included: what is the issue with funerals in South Africa? What is causing this issue? And how can the local Catholic Church in South Africa solve it? The purpose of this article is to briefly analyse and describe some of the major issues that the funeral brings to the local Catholic Church in South Africa in predominantly black communities. Within the context of South Africa, the beneficial impacts of the funeral can benefit the local Catholic Church's effort in family care. In this article, it is thus critical to describe the key sources of the problems, that is, without delving into and discussing the methods used by the local church to address some of the issues faced.

This is accomplished using a problem statement, which entails the psychological torture of family members in preparation for their family funerals, as well as the funeral of close filial family members. Social segregation by preferring affluent people's funerals over poor people's funerals can easily lead to unethical criminality in society. The burial societies and traditional cultural beliefs are the primary drivers of the problem. Local catholic bishops have addressed this issue through homilies and casual conversations with their congregations. However, at this time, the church must also engage in communication and collaboration with a range of traditional leaders, burial societies, and government officials in the Department of Education. The article uses critical reflection and analysis of the social situation of the people in South Africa as a methodology, with a special focus on the local Catholic Church and an indigenous community.

Concept

The idea of death serves as the article's central idea. It is a crucial idea since many family members in South Africa believe they have firsthand knowledge of what dying entails. As a result, they immediately move on to the subject of life after death, as if the theology of death had just begun. It is a means of avoiding the necessity of death. All of humanity's mysteries are contained within death. A person becomes a question for himself in the most extreme sense at this point. God alone has the power to provide the solution (Paul VI, *Gaudium et Spec*, 1965:18). A man does not experience death along with many other things. The moment a man dies, he transforms into the final version of himself. It is a situation that worries a person. A person is a unified whole of nature and personality. Prior to having the ability to make their own free decisions, this individual is a creature with established laws. A person must freely dispose of himself in order to become what he freely wills to be. This is necessary development. Death is a normal part of life for humans. It is the result of original sin, according to the magisterium and the Bible (Denzinger, 1957: 101, 1092, 175; Denzinger and Schönmetzer, 1965: 413; Denzinger, 1957: 788f); it is the moral disaster of humanity (Romans 5); it applies to everyone and cannot be destroyed.



Perhaps this is the wrong method to tell the truth about death since it is so readily misunderstood to imply that there would have been no personal or original sins had there been none, or that before "Adam," there would have been no death in the animal kingdom. In stating that this is not the case that without original or personal sin, man would have persisted in perpetuity in his or her biological timeline, or that before "Adam," there was no death in the animal kingdom, the local South African Catholic Church is promoting an incorrect viewpoint. Even without sin, man would have ended his biological, historical life in space and time, and would enter his final state before God by free act of interdependence. Regarding his entire life, death is a constitutive part of a man prone to lust, in the dark, weak and obscuring his true nature. That is the result of sin.

We do not necessarily succeed in distinguishing between death as a personal fulfillment of life and death as a manifestation of sin. But all original sinners are subject to the law of death (Denzinger, 1957:789). Followers of 1 Corinthians 15:51 will be found alive at the "*Parousia*" (Matthew 10:23; 16:27f; 19:28 and passim; Acts 1:11; 2 Peter 1:16; Revelation 1:4,7. This is the Greek word for the second coming of Christ), eternal life must be achieved (Rahner & Vorgrimler, 1965:336) by a radical change that is essentially death-like, death is the end of a person's personal history (Luke 16:26; John 9:4; 2; Corinthians 5:10; Galatians 6:10).

Possibility of death

Death is a separation of body and soul. This implies that the spiritual principle of man's life, his soul, presupposes a different relationship at death with what we are used to calling 'the body.' Thus, for the local Catholic Church of South African, the phrase did not qualify as a definition of death in accordance with metaphysical or theological requirements. As it passes in silence the characteristic feature of death, that is, it is a human event in relation to man in general and as a spiritual being, and an event concerning the nature of death. It is, its ultimate personal and free perception. This is certainly not conceived as occurring "with" or "after" death, but as an intrinsic factor of death itself. With respect and honor for the deceased, one might note that the local South African Catholic Church in South Africa believes that plants and animals perish, that is then only man literally dies.

Death is the beginning of eternity. It is neither the end of one's existence nor a simple journey from one form of reality to another that has essentials in common with it, namely an infinite time series. The people of South Africa are a dialectical unity mysteriously, broken and ended from nothing, because of God's unpredictable intervention when He casts judgment without anyone knowing the date or the time (Mark 13: 31). One's death is an event to be endured passively, which the person must face as an impotent when it comes from the outside. But in essence it is also a personal fulfillment, one's own death, an act that man performs within. Death in South Africa is properly understood as an action, not simply an attitude that people adopt in the face of death, but also externally existing towards it.

Death is the end of a human being as a physical person. It is an active consummation from within brought about by the person himself, a maturing self-realization that embodies the result of what a person has made of himself during life, the achievement of total personal self-possession, a real effectuation of self, the fullness of freely produced person reality. The death of a person is the end of his biological life. It is simultaneously, a way that affects the whole person. Death is an



explosion without destruction, so the death of a person from within by one's reality is simultaneously an event of the most radical human degeneration. Death is the highest and greatest passive activity in a person's life. In the substantive unity of man, it is impossible to divide these two aspects of the same death between soul and body, for that would dissolve the essence of being human.

Impossibility of death

Because the duality is not clear, death is essentially opaque: this means, death is impossible, humanly speaking, to say with certainty in a particular case whether it will be achieved. To the time of living fully in death is not in fact the emptiness and futility of the individual referred to as a human being, hitherto concealed, to know whether the apparent emptiness in death is only the outward aspect of a true fullness, the emancipation of one's true being.

Because of this darkness, death can be the punishment and manifestation of sin, the culmination of sin, fatal sin in the proper sense, or the culmination of one's entire life's actions, in which he renounces himself in faith to the unfathomable. The mystery of God is most radically expressed in the depriving of man through death. In this view, death is an event that identifies with the unique history of man's freedom which, in its totality, and produces the final state of man/woman, insofar as this event ends at (rather than) the end, which is marked by extinction in the medical sense but life everlasting when seen spiritually.

Since Jesus Christ became a man of the fallen race of Adam and was implicitly "flesh of sin" (Romans 8: 3), he entered human life in a situation in which it finds no more satisfaction than passing through death in its vague and, obscure form. So he takes death upon himself because in the existing scheme of things it is an expression and manifestation of the fallen creature state in both angels and men (John Paul II, 1995).

Reflection

This reflection focuses on the main causes of the problem described above. These are materialism, consumerism, and modernism. For a better understanding, it is necessary to elucidate each one of them. Other causes include the fear of not attending funerals and funerals that happen to a family: If I don't go to my neighbor's funeral tomorrow, he won't come to the funeral that happens to me, my family. Most South Africans belong to funeral societies, commonly known as the "Burial societies". These funeral societies have their community meetings mainly on Sundays. Every funeral society has provisions for a fine for missing a meeting or being seriously questioned, so most of the family members are afraid of being questioned and paying this fine. Funeral social gatherings are held on Sunday mornings and in the afternoons; some people spend the whole day together, while others belong to more than one club (Kokoali & Hodgson, 1985:10). "One of the efforts that can be made to overcome the problem of secrecy of congregations from one church to another is to grow and increase the congregation's commitment to the local church. Organizations are like social creatures. "Thus, as social beings should the success of an organization also depends on the mutual trust, sustainability, and intimacy of its members. And the third thing is that it boils down to one's commitment to the organization" (Lontoh & Chia, 2023).



These are the hours traditionally reserved by the Catholic Church for the celebration of Holy Mass, because everything must begin with God and end with God. Included is that each day must begin and end with God. South Africa is, culturally, a public society. The danger of this community is that its members do not do justice to an individual's free will. Everything a man wants to do as an individual, he has to pay for it painfully as an individual. Thus, family members find themselves very attached to each other with what they have contributed to the family of the deceased, such as for example money, and the basics such as meals, flour and firewood.

It is the material wealth that each family brings out to support the material family, but it seems that they are related to each other, everyone wants, the contributor wants the food to eat. So, the Catholic Church had nothing material to offer the people on Sundays, was left alone and was empty to the detriment of funeral celebrations. Critics of funerals in South Africa can easily interpret this as an exposure to the prevailing spirit of materialism. Materialism is an attitude towards life and an interpretation of the world based on material phenomena that are philosophically termed as matter. Materialism considers matter to be the principle of all reality, whether equivalent or causal, that is, matter alone, or as the effective cause (mechanically in idealism; metaphysical, mechanical in the dialectical materialism) of everything, real or other. In part, materialism considers matter to be in the exclusive principle of a certain ontological realism. Philosophically, materialism considers matter to be matter, as corporeal, as the world of bodies made of it, and has various views on what matter is. It is an attitude or explanation that can be spontaneous and non-critical in relation to the pastoral care of the family.

People tend to consider theory more than practical reality. Materialism becomes theory, not reality and people are duped by illusions of prosperity. Materialism is only suitable for sensual pleasure. They become thoughtless and naïve +to specific situations. What they do often links theory with idealism, and not with real life. Only modernism it seems, can fit materialism in the South African context.

Modernism, in the strict theological sense, is a general term for the multifaceted doctrinal and disciplinary crisis of the church at the late 19th century (Pius X, 1907) and early 20th century (Pius X, 1907). Modernism is the tendency to value the modern era more than ancient (16th century). It can be used in a religious sense to refer to the anti-Christian tendencies of the modern world and the radicalism of liberal (19th century) theology. The Catholic Church begs for a reform of the Church and its teachings in the sense of adapting them to meet diverse modern needs. It means here that a complex of well-defined heresies constituting the logical conclusion of the unorthodox trends in the movement mentioned in its many forms and in many respects is just and simply reckless and arguably wildly exaggerated. With regard to modernism and its reaction, the term is often applied haphazardly to all those who have reduced it adopting a strictly conservative point of view.

Such harsh criticisms make it easy for opponents of the church to rebuke the church for being impervious to any modernization efforts. Modernism in the South African context is an orientation, a tendency, rather than a defined set of doctrines. The modern era must be brought into conformity with the demands of the Christian spirit. In South Africa, which does not claim to be modernists, liberal Catholic modernism advocates are primarily an attempt to advance two areas: one is an attempt to change the traditional church disciplines to fit their own traditional cultural



practices. The other is an opponent (the local South African Catholic Church) that too claims of almost absolute freedom for Catholic Christian practices that respect the teaching of the magisterium.

The term *laïcité* comes from the English word "secularization or secular, the first comes from the Latin term "seccularis," which means secular, or temporal; and constitutes a distance from secularism and temporal (Keller, 1975:1554-1561). While the later "secular" ultimately means "not religious or spiritual." In case of the priest, he is neither subject to, nor bound by the religious norms (Soanes, 2008:812). Since all these words refer to a theory or process to which things or people are assigned to the world, they are often used interchangeably. Today it is increasingly common to distinguish between them. Secularization in South Africa's history was primarily used to confiscate church property for mundane purposes, primarily by the State and against the will of the Church. This has happened again and again throughout history, in the universal Catholic Church, for various reasons. In canon law, secularization also means allowing professed members of a religious order to live for the rest of their lives outside the convent. In present-day South Africa, secularization is now understood as the process by which various elements of human life such as attitudes, customs, social forms, and even things and people or whole lives are understood. Human life is no longer defined by religion because it has become secular.

Discussion

This discussion revolves around two main axes, funerals and pastoral care. Funerals represent the transcendent character of death according to Christianity and correspond to the circumstances and traditions found in different regions. In the Catholic Church, different liturgical colours are even used in funeral celebrations (*Sacrosanctum Concilium of Paul VI*, 1963: 81). Their pastoral function is seen as that of shepherding the faithful in the name of Christ (*Lumen Gentium of Paul VI*, 1964:23; *Fidei Donum of Pius XII*, 1957; *Acta Apostolicae Sedis – AAS*, 49(237) and Canon Law as they spoke of the parish: "The pastoral office of the parish is entrusted to a parish priest as his own pastor under the authority of the diocesan bishop" (CIC, canon 515 §1). In normal times, in the parish, all the faithful gather to celebrate the Sunday Eucharist. The parish brings Christians into the ordinary expression of the liturgical life: it brings them together in this celebration. The church must be viewed as a family member that cares (Healey, 1995). He taught the saving doctrine of Christ. She practices God's charity by good works and brotherly love. It is very important, as Saint John Chrysostom says: "You cannot pray at home as at church, where there is a great multitude, where exclamations are cried out to God as from one great hear, and where there is something more: the union of minds, the accord of souls, the bond of charity, the prayers of the priests" (Chrysostom, 3, 6:48, 725). People as *Laos* or 'nation of God' need to worship God in His church or *ekklesia* The Holy Spirit guides believers in their Christian life, and helps keep them on the path towards eternal life. People become transformed into a little god within the Body of God (Nicolaidis, 2010).

Funerals

In South African society, the comfort bereaved families and men and women who are threatened with death is not of a single group concern. Several groups are related, and these include the neighbours, burial societies of various types, such as the Wisani burial society, "*aretsebaneng*"



(in North Sotho) “let us know each other” (in English, literal translation to English is for us to know each other), and “*sebatakgomo*,” or “beast,” friends, and church.

The Wisani Funeral Association is a nationally established funeral organization. Its role is to collect the bodies of the dead and keep them safe in the in a Mortuary (they are popularly known as undertaker’s). This Wisani funeral society is like insurance. Admission is voluntary depending on the family members. Payment is made monthly on the amount that the family member or members agree on with the funeral association. Generally, this is a fixed amount and changes annually. “*Sebata-kgomo*” is a Sepedi (Northern Sotho) idiom that means “to call out for help” (Masoga & Shokane, 2019: 37-47). This happens when a family member passes away. One of the members of the community moves around, warning the members of the community that on a given day every family in this community must contribute and bring something to the bereaved family. The amount of each family’s contribution in that community is always fixed. This involves money, flour, and firewood. This is usually a specific community led by a traditional cultural leader commonly known as “*Nduna*” in northern Sotho.

Aretsebaneng is in North Sotho, and is literally translated into English as “let us know each other”. It is a group of family members descended from a particular ancestor. They meet at least once a month with a specific goal – to get to know each other. But in this type of meeting, they agree on a certain amounts of monetary contribution for the purpose of resolving any complaint that occurs. They also agree on how much to pay a family, for example, if a child dies, or if an adult man or woman dies. This is how “*aretsebaneng*” became a kind of small funeral festival in South Africa. What is interesting is the pastoral way in which the local Catholic Church in South Africa can ‘repair’ the families amid such family ‘repair’ situations.

Pastoral Care

Through funerals, the local Catholic Church recognizes death and dying. The local Catholic Church in South Africa believes that funerals testify to the hope that Christ’s death and resurrection has brought life eternal. That is, to say, faith in the paschal mystery is certainly the main metaphor of the contemporary Catholic faith in the face of death. It formed the renewal mandate of the second Vatican Council and was the central axis of the liturgical reform of funeral rites.

Pope Saint John Paul II crafted an apostolic letter termed *Salvifici doloris* on the Christian meaning of human sorrow. In number fifteen he stresses: “And even though the victory over sin and death achieved by Christ in his Cross and Resurrection does not abolish temporal suffering from human life, nor free from suffering the whole historical dimension of human existence, it nevertheless throws a new light upon this dimension and upon every suffering: the light of salvation” (John Paul II 1984, n. 15).

The central nature of the pastoral mystery for the local South African Catholic church is the recognition that one’s death, not just resurrection, is central to the mystery. But beyond that, faith in the resurrection of Jesus and the hope that gives Christians a head start is a participation in this resurrected life. This is beyond the limit of human mortality. It offers worshippers a way to understand death, which is the greatest threat to human identity. The passing mystery in a local



church is about death and resurrection. But death is what is known. While the resurrection is what we believe in, both are open to the public. With sensitive respect for the full impact of death, the South African local church recognizes that death causes sadness and grief especially at funerals. Jesus encouraged Christians to celebrate funeral rites. This is the pastoral character of Christian death. In Catholic tradition, the Christian funeral is its liturgy (Rutherford & Barr, 1990: Xi-Xii).

Like others, the local South African church is convinced that funerals are practical and also useful because they are an integral part of people's lives. Funerals play an important role in the life of the bereaved. The South African community is a deeply rooted and deeply religious community. Jesus approach to death involved accepting the consequence of death, much to the dismay and brokenness of his family. For the local South African Catholic Church, these impacts require a strong emotional response and community sharing with the bereaved. Because life is defined by its interaction with the society of which we are part. "We Drink from Our Own Wells emphasizes "life here and now" (Gutierrez, 1984). This is an indirect way of conveying the focus today in South Africa, which is on the harsh world of materialism that governs human survival. The social values that funerals in South Africa embody are at the heart of people's life-death issues. It refers to important African values, which South Africans often refer to as "*Ubuntu*" or "*Botho*" (Muller, 2005:266-280; Nicolaidis, 2022).

Today, most people in South Africa, especially Catholics, prefer funerals other than in the Church. This is a real challenge for the local Church in South Africa which has to wonder why these members of society would leave their community (chapel, or church) to organize themselves into churches, and create big shrines. This is a question of survival because people are always looking for ways to solve the social problems and social challenges they face. For example, funeral societies provide a partial solution to their problems. They provide the camaraderie and comfort that humans crave. They also provide a financing for funeral expenses. It is important that churches not only consider their field of interest, but they also to actively investigate the activities their members participate in after Sunday church services.

Salvifici doloris also stresses some aspects of what the church response must be like in front of suffering. Pope John Paul states: "We are not allowed to 'pass by on the other side' indifferently; we must 'stop' beside him. The name 'Good Samaritan' fits every individual who is sensitive to the sufferings of others, who 'is moved' by the misfortune of another" (John Paul II 1984, n. 28). Furthermore he says: "Therefore one must cultivate this sensitivity of heart, which bears witness to compassion towards a suffering person. Nevertheless, the Good Samaritan of Christ's parable does not stop at sympathy and compassion alone" (John Paul II 1984, n. 28).

In addition, many people, experience feelings of helplessness when faced with problems related to family relationships, marriage, morality, children, finances, housing, and unfair laws. So people needed answers, which they did not find in the church, even though the church acknowledge that death was not only a human making but also a divine plan. At funerals, the church encourages prayer for the soul of the deceased and their family members. A funeral is often for the church a moment of being in solidarity with the deceased. Comforting the family of the deceased is critical. Family members also express their gratitude to the bereaved. People become friends at funerals — human capital: sharing the good and the bad. Through the involvement of the local church,



Jesus, who shared with everyone, continues to be present in the lives of the family grieving the loss of a loved one.

With this in mind, the local church is aware and deeply saddened that in rural areas where some family members are illiterate, during the funerals, some family members abuse, crimes are perpetrated and some consider others to be the main cause of the deceased family members passing. Some indulge in stealing, get drunk and become greedy. The funeral also becomes an opportunity to raise funds for oneself and his or her family (organizers). Others do not pray but just observe. Instead of learning positive things, they learn negative things. Battles sometimes take place at funerals –people take their own lives. Theologically, the question is whether life can be explained by the intrinsic laws of very complex matters, or by the influence of a particular mental organizing principle. God can also create life according to the general laws of nature as well as through a particularly important organizing principle (Wacholder, 1965:49).

Rausch (2021) argues that the Catholic Church needs more than ever to tap into its many wisdom sources, its priests and ministers as well as its many intellectuals and theologians and its educational institutions and a range of social ministries, and above all the faith of its peoples. It must endeavour to seek better union with other Churches and Christian communities, and to work for greater interreligious understanding if it is to eventually fulfil Vatican II's vision of the Church as a sacrament of unity with the Creator and all His people (Rausch, 2021). Instead of sitting back, priest and clerics in the Catholic church should not stand by allow families to endure grief passively, they should still seek to support a grieving person and support them through their grieving process. Funerals invariably have grieving and clerics can still intervene and offer hope.

Conclusion

This article is narrowly contextual but very informative that applies to everyone. Funerals remind people of their own death. Man was tormented by pain, and by gradual decay of his body. But more than that because fear doesn't last forever and that is due to death. A deep instinct drives him to step back and refuse the complete destruction and complete loss of his personality. The importance of the church comes and testifies that man bears within him the seed of eternity. It cannot be reduced to nothingness. The church is the voice of Christ that calls people to rebel against death which has no sting. It does this by challenging all the other principles, such as materialism, consumerism, and modernity. A funeral, is a stepping stone of a local church's family care by the local church in South Africa. Our day to day lives need to consist of a walk in faith with God. For us to grow as people of faith, our faith must be exercised on a regular basis. Families need to look at the many things they are involved in each and every day and the problems that arise such as death, and then exercise their faith as Christians. From the outset, Pope Francis has tried to move the Church forward, and well away from a "self-referential" focus on itself and its own problems and on to a world so much in need of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. He envisions a missionary discipleship, capable of combating the "myths of modernity" ("individualism, unlimited progress, competition, consumerism, the unregulated market") (Francis, Encyclical *Laudato Si'* [LS], No. 210).

The article has gathered information from church doctrine, scripture and electronic sources. It concerns all men and women, whether they believe in God or not. The information it provides is



intended to help family members to be careful, and not to forget about their own fate and spiritual development. That is, to make South Africans, especially Catholics, more in tune with the inexcusable indignity of their human personhood. This includes the struggle for fraternity, to respond to the pressing calls of our time with a generous and shared effort of an Ubuntu and Christian *agape* love for all, deeply rooted in the Catholic Church. Faced with many situations and forms of human culture in South Africa, this article is intended to be general on many points, such as Catholics leaving their churches because of a society of mourning, and following the theme of materialism, and especially a lack of seriousness in teaching doctrine. The teaching presented by the churches will have to be pursued further and amplified, rather than be limited because it often deals with matters which are subject to one's continual development. These are suggestions based on the word of God and the Spirit of the Gospel. They harbour the hope that many of the suggestions listed will succeed in helping people to live more effectively, and guide them to assist all people, especially after they have been acclimated to different groups and spirits by the Catholics and accepted by other believers.

Perhaps a future study could try to establish from families of the deceased maybe a few months after a funeral, the extent to which they managed the bereavement without attending church – perhaps they would have been able to limit their stresses and feel greater security in a house of God. This, however, lies beyond the scope of this study.

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