

18). All in all, this meal is a reminder of Christ's resurrection and His closeness to those who believe in Him. It is never appropriate to serve meat at a *Makaria* that immediately follows a funeral.

A Christian funeral places a person's entire life and even death in the context of our faith in the Crucified and Risen Christ. It also enables family and friends to gather together to begin the process of accepting the painful reality of death and to express their love, grief and support for one another.

Memorial Services: *Set me as a seal upon your heart; for love is as strong as death. (The Song of Songs 8:6)*

Prayer for the dead is seen by Orthodox Christians as an essential component of our faith in Jesus Christ. Praying for those who have died is not merely an expression of mourning, it is a proclamation that Christ has risen from the dead and that, in His love, even death cannot separate us from one another! Forty days after the death of a loved one (or on the Sunday nearest to the 40 days), it is the custom of our Church to celebrate a prayer service in remembrance of the deceased known in English as a Memorial Service. In this service we ask God to "grant rest" to the deceased "in the bosom of Abraham" (Luke 16:22-23) and to place him/her "in a place of light, a place of happiness, a place of refreshment, where there is no pain, no sorrow and no suffering" (Revelation 21:4) as we did during the funeral service.

A tray of boiled wheat, raisins, pomegranate seeds and powdered sugar – called "*kolyva*" in Greek – is prepared for the service and distributed to parishioners at the Coffee Hour. This practice is based on the words of Jesus used to describe His own death and resurrection when He said, "Amen, I say to you: unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains a single grain of wheat. But if it dies, it brings forth a good harvest" (John 12:24). The tray of *kolyva* is a symbol of our faith in the life giving death and resurrection of Christ.

It is meaningful for a family to offer *kolyva* that has been prepared at home. However, for those who do not have the stamina, skill or time to prepare the *kolyva*, contact your local priest; often he will know of alternative arrangements that can be made for its preparation.

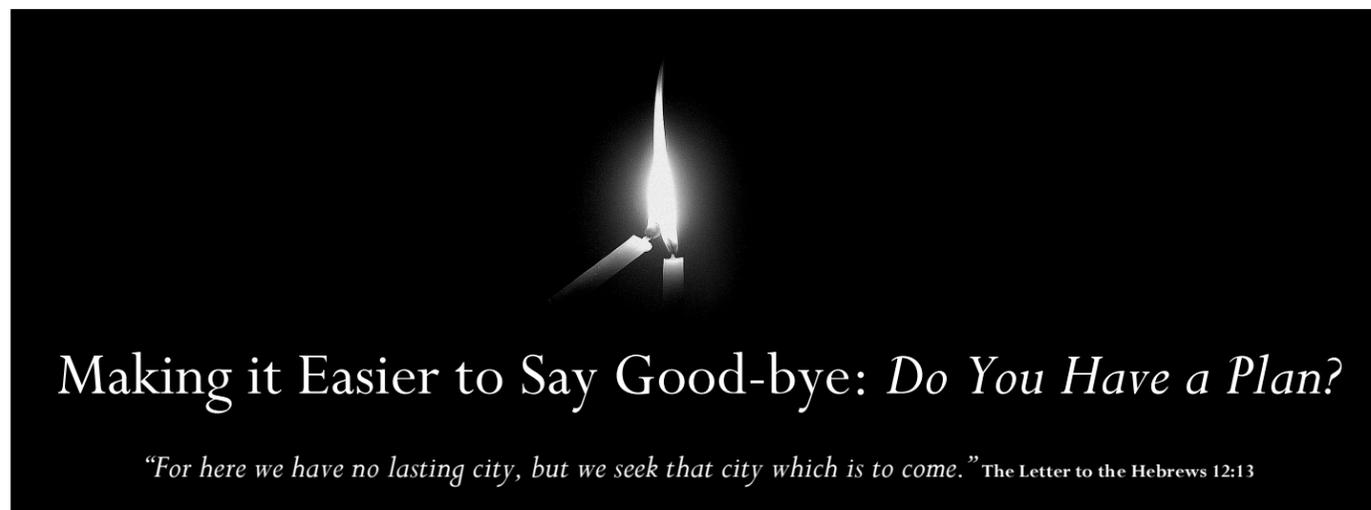
In addition to the 40 day Memorial Service, Memorial Services are normally held annually on or near the anniversary of the loved one's death. Memorials or Trisagion services (celebrated without *kolyva*) should be arranged by contacting your local priest *at least* two weeks before the desired date. Please note that memorial services are not customarily celebrated on major feast days nor (with the exception of 40-day memorials) on the Sundays of Great Lent. Everyone – especially those with loved ones whose anniversary of passing falls during Lent and Holy Week – is encouraged to remember their departed loved ones annually by submitting their names to be commemorated on the Saturdays of Souls associated with Great Lent and the celebration of Pentecost.

HOW WISHES ARE COMMUNICATED: It is critical that you make your wishes and plans known to your loved ones. Our world today requires that many of these wishes be documented in a will or trust. Also, a living will and burial instructions can be prepared so there is no confusion at a time when it is easy to overlook important orthodox traditions because stress and emotions are running high. The Stewardship Ministries of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese has prepared an Orthodox Living Will that can be filled in and reviewed by your family, doctor and legal advisor. It is important, and we urge you to seek competent legal and financial advice and also the advice of your parish priest. We also ask that consider joining the Eternal Light Society of your local parish and that you remember the Church in your will.

"For if we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord. So then, whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord's."
Romans 14:8



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Death is something that awaits all of us and our loved ones – yet we often wish to avoid thinking about it. As Orthodox Christians, we know that "Christ is risen from the dead" (1 Corinthians 15:20) and understand earthly death both as an encounter with the Risen Christ and the door to what the Lord Jesus calls "eternal life" (John 3:16). In this sense, for believers, death is not the end but a new beginning. Christians, as St. Paul writes, "do not grieve as others do who have no hope" (1 Thessalonians 4:13).

It is important to recognize this and plan for passing. You should consider preparing a will and a "Living Will". Your wishes must be communicated to those that will carry them out and it is important that all recognize the uniqueness of Orthodox Christian customs and traditions. If you do not signify your wishes with the appropriate documents, your wishes may not be carried out and important Orthodox traditions may not be followed.

As part of your planning, you will likely prepare a will and a "Living will". You will consider loved ones and important organizations and causes in your life. For all of us, the Church has played an important roll in our lives. It is where we find ourselves in the most joyous and most sorrowful times of our lives. Throughout your life you have committed faithfully to support the various ministries of your church. You probably participated in numerous efforts to support special needs, such as building the church, iconography or paying off the mortgage. Each gift you've made is an expression of your love for the Church and your thankfulness for God's Blessings in your life. As you plan, we ask you to consider joining the Eternal Light Society. Through the Eternal Light Society you can continue to support your Church for years and even generations to come. To join the Eternal Light Society of your parish or to receive more information, contact your parish priest or a member of the parish's Planned Giving Committee.

LIVING WILLS: When doing your estate planning it is common to also include a "Living Will". This deals with how medical care will be provided if you can't give the instructions yourself. In your living will, you designate a "Health Care Agent" to be your representative and make the decisions you can't make yourself. For our Orthodox faithful, is important that the Living Will reflect an Orthodox perspective. There are many prayers and observances that can give great comfort to the patient and family. These may be missed if the Living Will doesn't reflect an Orthodox perspective. The Stewardship Ministries of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese has prepared an Orthodox Living Will that can be filled in and reviewed by your family, doctor and legal advisor. We urge you to contact your Priest for guidance.

PREPARATION FOR THE FUNERAL: Orthodox funerals are distinct from other Christian traditions. Thus, it helps to secure the services of a funeral home with experience in this regard. You probably know of an appropriate funeral home in your area, but if you don't, contact your priest for guidance. Your funeral director will guide you through the process of choosing a burial plot, headstone, clothing, obituary, pallbearers, florist and any photos that are needed. He or she should also be instructed to coordinate all arrangements with the priest and the funeral director can guide you through the process of obtaining a death certificate – of which at least 5-10 copies are needed for Social Security, Veteran, insurance and other purposes. Concerning the obituary, today many newspapers allow families to buy space for an obituary of their composition.

It is helpful if a family member or friend who is skilled in writing researches and composes one in advance. Given the grief and confusion that often accompanies a passing; no one is too young to have made arrangements for a plot, headstone and burial in advance. All things being equal, funerals should ideally take place within three or so days from a person's passing. Extending arrangements beyond this interferes with the deceased's right to be laid to rest in quick and dignified fashion.

AUTOPSIES: When a person dies for reasons that are uncertain, a qualified medical examiner may, with the permission of the next of kin, perform an autopsy to determine the cause of death. In some states, this is required by law. Often an autopsy may add to the body of medical knowledge and help ameliorate illnesses for others in the future. In all cases, however, the Orthodox Church expects that the body of the deceased be treated with respect and dignity and kept in a state that allows for an open-casket funeral.

ORGAN DONATION: The Church considers organ donation an act of love and, as such, encourages it. The donation of an organ from a deceased person can help a recipient live a longer and fuller life. Such donations are acceptable if the deceased donor had willed such action and/or if surviving relatives permit it – providing that it was in harmony with the desires of the deceased. Such actions can be approved as an expression of love if they express the self-determination of the donor. Organ transplants should never be commercialized nor coerced nor take place without proper consent. The death of the donor should never be hastened in order to harvest organs for transplantation to another person. Finally, Orthodoxy does not approve of “giving one's body to ‘science’” – as this precludes a proper Orthodox funeral (with the body present) and can be detrimental to the dignity that should be afforded the body. Donation of organs and other body parts should always be made with a mind toward allowing an open-casket funeral to take place.

SUICIDE: The Church teaches that Suicide – the taking of one's own life – is a sin. One may repent for the killing of *another* and be forgiven through the sacrament of Confession. However in the case of suicide, the possibility of repentance is, by definition, eliminated. More importantly, suicide may be evidence of a lack of hope and faith in our loving, forgiving, sustaining God. If a person has committed suicide as a result of a belief that such an action is rationally or ethically defensible, the Orthodox Church denies that person a Church funeral because such beliefs and actions separate a person from the community of faith. It should be noted though that the Church shows compassion on those who have taken their own life as a result of mental illness or severe emotional stress, when this condition of impaired rationality can be verified by a physician. In this case, permission for the funeral must be granted in consultation with the presiding hierarch of the Metropolis or District.

MANNER OF INTERMENT / PROHIBITION OF CREMATIONS: It is Orthodox Christian tradition is to bury the dead. Cremation is prohibited and is not an option if an Orthodox funeral is desired. Because Orthodoxy affirms the fundamental goodness of creation, it understands the body to be an integral part of the human person and the temple of the Holy Spirit, and expects the bodily resurrection of the dead. The Church therefore considers cremation to be inconsistent with our belief in bodily resurrection, and requires that the body be buried so that the natural process of decomposition may take place. It is important to be aware that cremation would preclude a Church funeral, either in the church or at the funeral home or at any other place. In addition, memorial services with kolyva (boiled wheat) are not allowed in such instances, inasmuch as the similarity between the "kernel of wheat" and the "body" no longer exists. The body of the deceased is respectfully placed in a casket and set in a grave. The body of the deceased, which St. Paul describes as “a temple of the Holy Spirit” (1 Corinthians 6:19), is returned to the earth from which it was taken (Genesis 2:7).

OPEN CASKET: Our tradition as Orthodox Christians is that the casket normally be open during services at the mortuary and the Church. It is well documented that allowing for an open casket assists survivors with processing their grief. The reasoning that people don't want their family and friends to “see them that way” cannot stand when compared to thousands of years of Orthodox Christian tradition. The open casket is especially important during the funeral service at church, since it symbolizes the last time the deceased will gaze upon the Holy Altar – from whence they obtained the Holy Eucharist during their lifetimes. A closed casket will be contemplated only in cases of severe disfigurement (catastrophic accident, fire, etc.) or advanced state of decomposition and, then, only in consultation with the presiding priest. The casket is normally closed for the graveside *Trisagion*.

MEMORIAL DONATIONS: Thousands of dollars can be spent by family and friends for funeral flowers. As Orthodox Christians we believe it is far more consistent with our values to, in lieu of flowers, choose Orthodox-related organizations or institutions as recipients for donations that will leave a constructive legacy behind. To this end, many designate, and we encourage you to designate your local parish or Philoptochos and/or other Orthodox causes such as Hellenic College/Holy Cross School of Theology, the Orthodox Christian Mission Center (OCMC) or International Orthodox Christian Charities (IOCC) – and note this preference in the obituary.

VIEWING/VISITATION: The viewing – or visitation – as it is commonly known is held the late afternoon and early evening the day(s) before the funeral with the *Trisagion* being held in the evening. The *Trisagion* is a brief service, no more than ten minutes in length. During this service – as at the Funeral Service the next day – we pray that the Lord will grant forgiveness of sins and rest to soul of the deceased “in the bosom of Abraham” (Luke 16:22-23) with Christ and the saints where “there is no pain no sorrow and no suffering” (Revelation 21:4). Although the visitation has commonly been held at the funeral home, in recent years there has been a trend toward holding it in the church temple. Please consult with your local priest for more information on this option.

FUNERAL: The Funeral is held at Church and lasts about 35 minutes. However, including the eulogy and the final farewell by family and friends, one should count on the entire proceedings lasting for about an hour or more if a large gathering is expected. The Funeral Service consists primarily of the singing of verses from Psalm 119, a series of hymns on the meaning of life and death composed by St. John of Damascus (676-749AD), Scripture readings from St. Paul's First Letter to the Thessalonians 4:13-18 and the Gospel of John 5:24-30 and a brief homily/eulogy by the priest. In the Scripture readings, prayers and hymns of the Funeral Service, a dramatic dialogue takes place between God, the deceased and everyone in attendance. The service acknowledges the painful realities of human existence and the frailty of life, yet reminds those present of God's infinite mercy and love. It asks that we "ponder how brief our life is" but also speaks of the power of the Risen Christ, the Kingdom of God, the resurrection of the dead and immortality. At the conclusion of the service, everyone present is invited to come forward to venerate the icon of the Resurrection and offer their final respects to the deceased. After the congregation and family have offered what the Funeral Service calls "the final kiss" to their loved one, the priest anoints the body of the deceased in the form of a cross with oil and earth reciting several verses from the Scriptures. During the anointing with oil, the priest says: "You shall sprinkle me with hyssop and I shall be made clean. You shall wash me and I shall become whiter than the snow" (Psalm 51:7); and then, with the placing of earth, he says: “The earth is the Lord's, and the fullness thereof; the world, and all that dwells therein.” (Psalm 24:1) and "You are dust and unto dust you shall return" (Genesis 3:19).

It should be especially noted that the Orthodox funeral tradition stipulates that **only** the priest offers a homily/eulogy during services in Church. Family members and friends who wish to speak and share memories may do so at the *Makaria*.

Following the Funeral Service held at the Church the deceased is taken to the cemetery where another *Trisagion* is prayed at the graveside, where the deceased will await the Second Coming of Christ. Weather and conditions allowing, there are families who choose to witness the lowering of the casket into the ground before leaving the graveside. This often helps lend an air of finality and ultimate closure to the funeral services.

The *Makaria* or Meal of Blessing: Following the graveside service, it is customary to invite mourners to a meal called, in Greek, the *Makaria*. The aim of the meal is create an atmosphere of simplicity, where the emphasis is on remembering the life and accomplishments of the deceased and where families do not vie with one another in offering the choice beef, lamb, lobster or other delicacy. This is why Greek Orthodox tradition stipulates that the main *Makaria* dish be a simple meal of fish. There are several reasons for this. The first meal that the Lord Jesus ate with His disciples following His resurrection from the dead consisted of broiled fish and bread, as recorded in the Gospel of John 21:12-13. It is also one of the foodstuffs that Jesus chose to multiply (Matthew 14:13-18, Matthew 15:29-39, Mark 6:30-44, Luke 9:10-17, John 6:1-15) when He fed the masses. The fish was also an early Christian symbol for Christ – ΙΧΘΥΣ – which spells “fish” in Greek. “ΙΧΘΥΣ” is an acrostic, a word formed from the first letters of several words: Jesus–Christ–God's–Son–Savior (Ιησοῦς-Χριστός- Θεοῦ-Υἱός-Σωτήρ.) Then there is also Christ's promise to His disciples to make them “fishers of men” (Matthew 4:14-