

Combinations of Readings for Different Situations

1. The deceased was a practicing Catholic who died peacefully of natural causes.

Old Testament: Wisdom 3:1-9

New Testament: 2 Corinthians 5:1, 6-10

If the deceased is widely viewed as just and worthy of eternal life, then the Wisdom passage presents a comforting image of the person resting peacefully in God's hand, while the mention of judgment at the end of the 2 Corinthians passage does not cause the mourners any anxiety. They want the person to receive a fair reward for a life well-lived and to go to his/her permanent home in heaven.

Several gospel passages could be paired with these readings, depending on the personal history of the deceased. For example:

- *John 12:23-28* for one who was known for tirelessly serving others
- *John 6:51-58* for one who was especially devoted to the Eucharist
- *Luke 12:35-40* for one who was at peace and ready to die

2. The deceased suffered for years from a degenerative illness.

Old Testament: Wisdom 3:19

New Testament: 2 Corinthians 4:14-5:1

Gospel: John 14:1-6

The Wisdom passage recalls how agonizing the process of dying looks, but the 2 Corinthians passage balances that sorrow by speaking about the inner self being renewed as the outer self wastes away. The two together strike a realistic but hopeful tone.

The gospel passage picks up on the idea of the permanent dwelling in heaven, introduced by 2 Corinthians, and personalizes it. *Jesus* prepares a place for us, and then leads us home to be with him.

3. The deceased died suddenly from an accident or medical emergency.

Old Testament: Isaiah 25:6a, 7-9

New Testament: 1 Corinthians 15:51-57

Gospel: John 11:17-27

Situations like this are a test of faith for the mourners. These readings embrace that challenge, rather than shying away from it. Isaiah's prophecy has been partially fulfilled in *Jesus*, but not completely. Christ has conquered death, but has not yet wiped away the tears from all faces. Likewise, Paul is correct to say that death has been swallowed up in Christ's victory, yet death still stings, especially under these circumstances. So, the mourners are left to face the question that *Jesus* puts so directly to Martha, just days after losing her dear brother: "I am the

resurrection and the life... Do you believe this?" The mourners must answer that question for themselves, but Martha offers them an example to follow.

4. The deceased died as a result of violence.

Old Testament: Lamentations 3:17-26

New Testament: 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

Gospel: John 12:23-28

The mourners' emotions will be very raw in a case like this. They will be searching for answers and not finding any that satisfy them. The Lamentations passage expresses that deep sorrow and frustration, yet encourages patience and trust in the Lord. Meanwhile, the 1 Thessalonians passage encourages the mourners to turn to their faith for comfort.

The gospel image of the grain of wheat dying in order to give life can be used in this situation to speak about death as the only pathway to eternal life. Hence, the mourners are encouraged to look past the cause of death, which is a source of intense anger, and focus on the positive meaning of death itself.

5. The deceased committed suicide.

Old Testament: Job 19:1, 23-27

New Testament: 1 John 3:1-2

Gospel: John 6:37-40

Job's anguish, feeling of helplessness, and longing to escape the horrors of this life all match what the deceased experienced prior to death. So, Job's words can offer a glimmer of hope that the deceased also longed to see God.

The passage from 1 John speaks about finally seeing God as he is. People who commit suicide generally are prevented by mental illness from seeing themselves or the world around them very clearly, and they usually cannot believe that God really loves them as they are. This passage offers hope that death has finally given the person the freedom to see clearly and to know how deeply he/she was loved all along.

Lest anyone be concerned about God judging the deceased harshly for despairing, Jesus says unequivocally that the Father wants him to save everybody who believes in him. Hence, the mourners' hope for eternal life for their loved one is solidly grounded in the words of the Lord himself.

6. The deceased was estranged from the Church.

Old Testament: Isaiah 25:6a, 7-9

New Testament: 1 John 3:1-2

Gospel: John 6:37-40

The faithful members of the deceased's family may be concerned about the state of his/her soul at the time of death and the implications for salvation or condemnation. Hence, the pastoral challenge is similar to the case of suicide, and the same Gospel passage can apply. Our greatest assurance of eternal life comes from Jesus' words in John 6, where he explicitly says that the Father sent him into the world to save everyone and condemn no one.

In this case, the 1 John passage can be used to suggest that the deceased's lack of devotion may have resulted from ignorance of God's love, from not "seeing" God clearly in this life. Now the person will know God's love for all eternity.