

OPTIONAL FUNERAL SERVICE

Authorized by Grand Lodge, 1935

Part I

INTRODUCTION

MASTER: Brother Senior Warden, in this hour of sorrow what duties devolve upon us as Masons?

SENIOR WARDEN: To honor the memory of a Brother whom death has taken from us; to contemplate our own approaching dissolution; and, by the remembrance of immortality, to raise our souls above the considerations of this transitory existence.

MASTER: Brother Junior Warden, what sentiments should inspire the souls of Masons on occasions like the present?

JUNIOR WARDEN: Calm sorrow for the absence of a Brother gone before; earnest solicitude for our own eternal welfare; and firm faith in the wisdom and goodness of the Great Architect of the Universe.

MASTER: Brother Secretary, has a scroll been prepared, that the memory of our Brother may not depart from us?

SECRETARY: It is hereon written and shall also be preserved in our archives.

MASTER: You will read the scroll and place it with the remains of our Brother.
Secretary reads and deposits scroll.

CHAPLAIN: O Thou that hearest prayer, unto Thee shall all flesh come. Let Thy mercy, O Lord, be upon us according as we hope in Thee. Amen.

ALL: So mote it be.

At the option of the Master, Part I, above, may be omitted. If it be omitted, the Scroll should be deposited just after the Evergreen in Part IV.

Part II

MASTER: Again we are standing in the presence of the great Mystery we call Death. The roll of the workmen has been called and another has not answered to his name.

In their narrow house before us lie the mortal remains of a Brother, overtaken by that fate which must sooner or later overtake us, and which neither power nor station, virtue nor bravery, wealth nor honor, nor tears of kindred and friends can avert. In this inexorable end of mortality is taught an important lesson, endlessly repeated: that each of us must, ere long, pass through the valley of the shadow of death

[Very eloquent, my brethren, are the pale, still lips of the dead. With a pathos and impressiveness, which no living lips can equal, they preach to us sermons that cannot be translated into words. Most persuasively they explain how vain and empty are all hatreds, jealousies, disputes and rivalries; all struggles for wealth, for place and power, for rank and preference.]

[In the grave all ranks are leveled and all distinctions done away. The monarch at whose bidding nations pay tribute and the poor beggar at his gate are equals in the hour of death. The one must part with his sceptre and crown; the other has no further use for his wallet and rags; and each is indebted to mother earth for a sepulchre. For them, both, earth's dim glories have faded, like the stars at morning, in the dawn of immortality.]

[This solemn scene stirs up these reflections with a force, which should give us pause.]

He who slumbers here in the peace that pass-eth understanding was our Brother. With him we have walked in the pilgrimage of life and kept ward and watch in its vicissitudes and trials. He is remembered in scenes to which the world was not a witness; where the richer attributes of humanity were exhibited without disguise.

This body over which we mourn is not our Brother, but only that which was his human and material part until God laid His hand upon him and he slept. He was mortal, but has now put on immortality; he sleeps, but he shall wake again.

As Freemasons we are taught, when clouds gather darkly, when affliction and sorrow come nearest our hearts, to look to the Great Architect of the Universe for comfort and support. Let us ask of Him power and assistance to do our duty, and His favor for those who are afflicted in even greater measure than ourselves.

CHAPLAIN: Heavenly Father, we come to Thee in this bereavement, seeking that consolation which Thou, alone, canst give. By communion with Thee we would strengthen our faith that in passing from this earth we are but entering that mystic borderland where clouds and shadows are unknown. While we mourn the departure of a beloved Brother from the circle of our fraternity, we believe that he has entered into a higher brotherhood, to engage in nobler duties and in more exalted work; to find rest from earthly labor and refreshment from earthly care.

As we, too, shall come, one by one, to the end of the day, may the twilight be illumined by a radiant glow; and may we fall asleep without alarm and fearless, with the sublime conviction that we shall be raised through the power of the Lion of the Tribe of Judah, and find a new home and perfect haven in that spiritual building, that house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. Amen.

ALL: So mote it be.

HYMM

"Abide With Me"

At the option of the Master, Part III on page following may be omitted.

Part III

MASTER: What man is he that liveth and shall not see death?

SENIOR WARDEN: Man walketh in a vain shadow; he heapeth up riches and cannot tell who shall gather them.

JUNIOR WARDEN: When he dieth he shall carry nothing away; his glory shall not descend after him.

MASTER: If a man die, shall he live again?

SENIOR WARDEN: And they that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake.

JUNIOR WARDEN: And ye shall know I am the Lord when I have brought you up out of your graves.

MASTER: Where now is our departed Brother?

SENIOR WARDEN: He is gone to that undiscovered country from whose bourne no traveler returns.

MASTER: Can we offer any precious thing to redeem him?

JUNIOR WARDEN: We have not the ransom. The place that knew him shall know him no more forever.

MASTER: When our Brother died, did he carry nothing away with him?

CHAPLAIN: He has fulfilled his destiny; naked came he into the world and naked he has departed out of it.

MASTER: Hear, then, the conclusion of the whole matter: It is the Lord, only, Who can give, and it is the Lord Who hath taken away.

CHAPLAIN: I am the resurrection and the life, saith the Lord; he that believeth in Me, though he were dead, yet shall he live, and whosoever liveth and believeth in Me shall never die.

All extend arms full-length upward and outward, hands open. palms inward, eyes looking up and hold until end of "So mote it be."

MASTER: Almighty Father, into Thy hands we commend the soul of our departed Brother.

CHAPLAIN: The will of God is accomplished.

ALL: So mote it be.

HYMN
"Lead Kindly Light"

COMMITMENT

If Commitment Service, only, is said. it should, invariably, begin here.

Part IV

MASTER: From time immemorial it has been the custom of the fraternity of Free and Accepted Masons, upon proper request, to accompany the remains of a Brother to the place of disposition, there to deposit them with the ceremonies of the Craft. In conformity to this ancient usage we are assembled in the character of Masons to offer the last tribute of our affection for him, herein demonstrating, also, our steady attachment to the principles of our institution.

[The last sad offices paid to the dead are not only tokens of affectionate regard for their memory, but serve also as admonitions for us to prepare for our own approaching dissolution. We are too apt to regard these daily instances of mortality unmoved--except momentary sorrow --and forget that our frail bodies must soon yield to the Scythe of Time, as ripened grain to the reaper. The inanimate form of our Brother, which lies before us, is a striking instance of the certainty that we, too, will be called upon to go the way of ail flesh.]

[If, when the summer days of youth are slowly wasting into the nightfall of age, and the shadows of past years grow deeper and deeper as life wears to its close, we can look back upon a righteously spent life, we may, with feelings of satisfaction, be as "one who wraps the drapery of his couch about him and lies down to pleasant dreams."]

Let us learn anew some lessons from our own beautiful symbols:

Senior Warden takes apron from coffin and presents to Master.

MASTER: Brother Senior Warden, of what is the lamb an emblem?

SENIOR WARDEN: Of innocence.

MASTER: By the lambskin, therefore, the Mason is reminded of that purity of life and conduct so essential to his gaining admission into the Celestial Lodge above. This emblem, full of significance, you will deposit, Brother Senior Warden, on the coffin of our Brother.

Junior Warden takes evergreen and presents to Master.

MASTER: Brother Junior Warden, of what is this an emblem?

JUNIOR WARDEN: Of immortality.

MASTER: The evergreen, which once marked the resting place of one illustrious in Masonic legend, is an emblem of our faith in the immortality of the soul. By it we are reminded of our high and glorious destiny in the world beyond the shadows; and that there dwelt for a time within this tabernacle of clay, as there abides in each of us, an imperishable spirit over which the grave has no dominion and death no power.

Master and Bible-bearer move, each to his right, and simultaneously deposit evergreen, then resume stations; Senior and Junior Wardens follow, then others, in pairs, one from each side of coffin.

If full service is held at one place (at crematory or grave) Part IV will end here. If commitment is elsewhere, continue as follows:

CHAPLAIN: O Thou, Who are the Resurrection and the Life, bless to the strengthening of our souls the thoughts and experiences of this hour. May we go from this place with deeper sympathy, stronger faith, more earnest purpose, so that when our toils here shall have ceased we may be raised to the enjoyment of immortal life in that Kingdom where faith and hope shall end, and love and joy prevail throughout the eternal ages. Amen.

ALL: So mote it be.

HYMN

"It Is Well With My Soul"

If earth-burial is to be had the Master will here direct: "Brethren, the service will be resumed at the cemetery." If cremation, Part V, of the service, will follow.

Part V

GRAND HONORS

All step forward, uncover and deposit hats on ground, or floor, at feet. All make signs, once only. Master, only.

Pronounces words.

1. ***(Stretch arms full length downward toward coffin, hands open, palms outward)***

MASTER: His body we consign to the tomb ***(flames)***.

2. ***(Cross arms over breast, left over right, hands open, palms flat against shoulders)***

MASTER; His memory we cherish here.

3. ***(Extend arms full length upward and outward, hands open, palms inward, eyes looking up)***

MASTER: His soul we commend to God, Who gave it.

4. ***(Drop hands, palms against thighs. Secure hats'; recover)***

MASTER: Reverently we commit the body of our Brother to the grave ***(flames)--(Takes earth, if a grave; petals of flowers, if at church or crematory; and drops on coffin)***. Earth to earth;

SENIOR WARDEN *(Does likewise)*: Ashes to ashes;

JUMOR WARDEN *(Likewise)*: Dust to dust.

CHAPLAIN: Grand Master of the Universe, grant that what we have heard may sink deep into our hearts and bring forth in every one of us the fruit of righteous living. And when life's journey with us is ended--when the silver cord is loosed and the golden bowl is broken, when the pitcher is broken at the fountain and the wheel broken at the cistern--in that moment of mortal extremity may the lamp of Thy love dispel the gloom of the dark valley, and may we be enabled to work an entrance into the Celestial Lodge above; and in Thy glorious presence, amidst its ineffable mysteries, enjoy a union with the souls of departed friends perfect in happiness and as durable as is the eternity of God. Amen.

ALL: So mote it be.

If full service is held in one place

HYMN

at end of Part IV may be sung here.

MASTER: And now we bid him sleep until God shall wake him, as he surely will, on his eternal morrow. We have His promise, and are confident in the expectation that this seeming end is but the sleep of the winter time, the tarrying within the ante-chamber; and that perchance even now the spirit has awakened to a profound recognition, the ante-chamber been abandoned for the glorious mansion of the Father.

[There may have been storm-clouds along the road he traversed here, some dangerous pitfalls; there may be the knowledge of errors and of wrongs, marking the frailties which beset us all; but for his brethren there shall be recollection only of acts of kindness, of helpfulness, of striving for reconciliation and peace with Him Whom we have now and then called our Father.]

[So, with the knowledge that all is indeed well with this Brother, we leave him in God's eternal peace. Soon we, too, shall arrive at the temporary end where joy seems to cease, the clouds to lower and gloom to reign; but in this seeming end there will be, as now, the rich undertone of a great hope, the consolation of a sublime faith, the knowledge of a love that embraces a boundless charity; and, sustained and soothed by a promise of eternal life, we shall go into the great darkness undismayed and unafraid, knowing that the night, of death shall give way to the glorious morning of the resurrection, that sorrow shall be turned into joy and this mortal put on immortality.]

With firm faith in the Supreme Grand Master of the Universe, we know that we shall meet again. Until then, dear friend and Brother, until then, farewell!

CHAPLAIN: The Lord bless us, and keep us; the Lord make his face to shine upon us, and be gracious unto us; the Lord lift upon us the light of his countenance, and give us peace. Amen.

ALL: So mote it be.