

Holy Day Protocol

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Throughout the liturgical year certain feasts warrant a more joyous spirit and attention. In particular, those feasts that are ranked as “solemnities” and are at the same time designated as “holy days of obligation” follow a protocol all their own.

One situation arises when a funeral Mass or wedding Mass is considered on a solemn feast that happens to be a designated holy day of obligation. According to Catholic liturgical protocol, funeral Masses are forbidden to be celebrated on a solemnity that is designated a holy day of obligation. Specific directives from the *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* state that funeral masses are not permitted on “solemnities of obligation, on Holy Thursday and the Easter Triduum, and on the Sundays of Advent, Lent, and the Easter Season.” (*GIRM*, art. 380) Because these annual observances bear the integrity of first-class celebrations, no other celebrations of Mass, that is the prayer texts and readings for other Masses, are permitted.

When a marriage is celebrated on a Sunday or solemnity, the Mass of the Sunday or solemn feast is celebrated with the nuptial blessing and, where appropriate, the special final blessing. Like the protocol for funeral Masses, the wedding Mass may not be used from Holy Thursday to Easter and on the feasts of Christmas, Epiphany, Ascension, Pentecost, Corpus Christi and other holy days of obligation. (Intro., *Rite of Marriage*, art.11)

In those instances when a member of the faithful dies and the scheduled service happens to be on a solemnity of obligation, the funeral liturgy outside of Mass is to be used, or the scheduling of a funeral Mass is to occur on another day.

When solemnities that are holy days of obligation land on a Saturday or Monday, with the exception of Christmas and the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception on December 8, the obligation is suppressed. In these instances, funeral Masses are permitted. The guiding principal is clear: solemnities that are days of obligation take precedence over any other liturgical celebration.

The reason follows a long-standing tradition in the Church to maintain the integrity of those days designated as solemn observances. Practically speaking, the reason not to celebrate ritual Masses on solemnities that are holy days of obligation is to lessen the already busy schedules in parishes for holyday Masses.

Clearly, the pastoral response offered in these instances is to provide sensitivity toward the liturgical tradition of the Church and the milestone moments of the living

Church all at the same time. Ritual directives in these situations are not intended to exclude one another, but are customs embracing both tradition and lived experience.