

To: Valley Catholic
From: Catholic Cemeteries
Re: December Issue, 2008

Rituals of Remembrance

My parents were born in the early 1900s in the United States. Their beliefs were shaped in traditional Catholic families: one in Minnesota and one in Tennessee. Although they were from differing parts of the country, the ritual that they both valued was having Masses said for those who had died. My father reserved money in his will for this purpose, not only for himself, but for my mother and other family members who had died. This was a powerful ritual for him; he firmly believed that Mass provided potent grace that assisted a person's entry into heaven.

Each time a Mass is said, the departed are commemorated in the words of the Eucharistic Prayers. These prayers articulate our deepest hope for our loved ones: "May these...find in your presence light, happiness and peace." "Welcome into your kingdom our departed brothers and sisters ..."

During the holidays, our losses are often felt more intensely. These emotions are all part of the normal grieving process. When we acknowledge our sorrow and are able to grieve and remember our loved ones with compassion, healing occurs. As community and family, we can supplement our liturgical rites and prayers with projects that can be done alone or with others.

The Catholic Cemeteries invites you to participate in an annual ritual which is called the **Remembrance Tree**. It will take place at both *Calvary* and *Gate of Heaven* from Saturday, December 6 through January 5. People can visit during business hours, 8:30 – 4:30. Family and friends are invited to bring photos (copies) or a poem to place on the remembrance tree. There will be prayer cards available so people can write a name on it or a 'note' and place that on the tree. The person being remembered does not have to be buried at our cemeteries. **All** are welcomed to be remembered. You could also honor your deceased with a tree in your own home.

Where: Calvary Cemetery in St. Joseph's Mausoleum
Calvary 2655 Madden Ave., San Jose 95116
408-258-2940

Where: Gate of Heaven's lobby.
Gate of Heaven 22555 Cristo Rey, Dr Los Altos 94024
650-428-3730

We'd like to offer a few other suggestions of prayerful and meaningful ritual and activity to remember our dead throughout the holiday season.

Remembrance Ornaments – Prayer or memory cards can be made to look like ornaments which are then hung on a tree. Symbols or photos attached to foil-like paper will catch the light. Some ambitious people might want to make paper maché balls and then paint names, attach beads, glitter or words that are meaningful.

Remembrance Boxes – Most of us have photos and memorabilia stored in a closet, attic or garage. Some people actually get around to putting photos and letters in a special book. Find a box with a removable lid; shoe box size is good. Decorate it with beautiful paper, ribbon, prayers, and magazine pictures. These should reflect the spirit of the person you are memorializing. Inside the box, you can place or paste photos, small items, letters and other personal things that represent the person. A group of children from ---- School made shadow boxes for our *El Día de los Muertos* celebration, remembering their loved ones.

Remembrance Wreath – Evergreen wreaths are a staple of the holiday. Consider making one that represents your deceased loved one. What were their favorite colors, flowers, animals? Place the wreath in a special location during the season.

Remembrance Expression of Creativity - Writing activities can be particularly helpful for all ages. This can take a variety of forms: a letter, a story about a happy memory, or a poem based on the person's name. Feel free to express yourself by illustrating your writing or other forms or drawing and painting. Playing special music also can express what is difficult to articulate. Make special recipes that your loved one made or enjoyed. Photos of the person's life with family and friends can be placed on a table surrounded by holiday decorations.

Remembrance Service - If the deceased was involved in a particular charity or community association, you might consider volunteering in that organization during the holidays or in the New Year.

Remembrance Ashes – During a burial planning meeting, one person said that after her family placed her mother's ashes in a niche here at the cemetery, they were going to burn a few of her photos and letters and scatter those ashes in a park where the family has celebrated happy times.

There may be other rituals that you and your family have created to support you in your time of bereavement. If you have other ideas, please feel free to send those ideas to us so that we can share them in our holiday column next year.

Peace and Blessings in the New Year.