

Suggested Old Testament Readings for Funerals

Reading 1

A reading from the Book of Ecclesiastes 3.1-11

There is a season for everything, a time for every occupation under heaven:

A time for giving birth, a time for dying;

a time for planting, a time for uprooting what has been planted.

A time for killing, a time for healing;

a time for knocking down, a time for building.

A time for tears, a time for laughter;

a time for mourning, a time for dancing.

A time for throwing stones away, a time for gathering them;

a time for embracing, a time to refrain from embracing.

A time for searching, a time for losing;

a time for keeping, a time for discarding.

A time for tearing, a time for sewing;

a time for keeping silent, a time for speaking.

A time for loving, a time for hating;

a time for war, a time for peace.

What do people gain from the efforts they make? I contemplate the task that God gives humanity to labour at.¹¹All that he does is apt for its time; but although he has given us an awareness of the passage of time, we can grasp neither the beginning nor the end of what God does.

This is the word of the Lord

Reading 2

A reading from the prophet Isaiah. 25.6-9

On this mountain, for all peoples, God is preparing a banquet of rich food. On this mountain, he has destroyed the veil which used to conceal all peoples, the dark cloud enveloping all nations; he has destroyed death for ever. Lord God has wiped away the tears from every cheek; he has taken his people's shame away everywhere on earth, for God has spoken. And on that day, it will be said, 'Look, this is our God, in him we put our hope that he should save us, this is God, we put our hope in him. Let us exult and rejoice since he has saved us.'

This is the word of the Lord.

Reading 3

A reading from the Book of Job

19.1.23-27

Then Job answered and said:

Oh, would that my words were written down!

Would that they were inscribed in a record:

That with an iron chisel and with engraving tool cut in the rock forever!

But as for me, I know that my Vindicator lives,
and that he will at last stand forth upon the dust;

Whom I myself shall see:

my own eyes, not another's, shall behold him,

And from my flesh I shall see God;

my inmost being is consumed with longing.

This is the word of the Lord

Reading 4

A reading from the book of Lamentations 3.22-26

The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases,
his mercies never come to an end;
they are new every morning;
great is thy faithfulness.

“The LORD is my portion,” says my soul,
“therefore I will hope in him.”

The LORD is good to those who wait for him,
to the soul that seeks him.

It is good that one should wait quietly
for the salvation of the LORD.

This the word of the Lord

Reading 5

A reading from the book of Proverbs

10:6-14

Blessings are on the head of the upright, but the mouth of the godless is a cover for violence. The upright is remembered with blessings, the name of the wicked rots away. The wise of heart takes orders, but a gabbling fool heads for ruin. Anyone whose ways are honourable walks secure, but whoever follows crooked ways is soon unmasked. A wink of the eye brings trouble, a bold rebuke brings peace. The mouth of the upright is a life-giving fountain, but the mouth of the godless is a cover for violence. Hatred provokes disputes, but love excuses all offences. On the lips of the discerning is found wisdom, on the back of a fool, the stick. Wise people store up knowledge, but the mouth of a fool makes ruin imminent.

This is the word of the Lord

Reading 6

A reading from the Book of Wisdom

3:1-9

But the souls of the virtuous are in the hands of God, and no torment can touch them. To the unenlightened, they appeared to die, their departure was regarded as disaster, their leaving us like annihilation; but they are at peace. If, as it seemed to us, they suffered punishment, their hope was rich with immortality; slight was their affliction, great will their blessings be. God was putting them to the test and has proved them worthy to be with him; he has tested them like gold in a furnace, and accepted them as a perfect burnt offering. At their time of visitation, they will shine out; as sparks run through the stubble, so will they. They will judge nations, rule over peoples, and the Lord will be their king forever. Those who trust in him will understand the truth, those who are faithful will live with him in love; for grace and mercy await his holy ones, and he intervenes on behalf of his chosen.

This is the word of the Lord

Reading 7

A reading from the Book of Wisdom

3:1-3

But the souls of the virtuous are in the hands of God, and no torment can touch them. To the unenlightened, they appeared to die, their departure was regarded as disaster, their leaving us like annihilation; but they are at peace. If, as it seemed to us, they suffered punishment, their hope was rich with immortality; slight was their affliction, great will their blessings be.

This is the word of the Lord

Reading 8

A reading from the book of Wisdom

4:7-15

The upright, though he die before his time, will find rest. Length of days is not what makes age honourable, nor number of years the true measure of life; understanding, this is grey hairs, untarnished life, this is ripe old age. Having won God's favour, he has been loved and, as he was living among sinners, has been taken away. He has been carried off so that evil may not warp his understanding or deceitfulness seduce his soul; for the fascination of evil throws good things into the shade, and the whirlwind of desire corrupts a simple heart. Having come to perfection so soon, he has lived long; his soul being pleasing to the Lord, he has hurried away from the wickedness around him. Yet people look on, uncomprehending; and it does not enter their heads that grace and mercy await his chosen ones and that he intervenes on behalf of his holy ones.

This is the word of the Lord