

Escorting the Body of the Departed

Priests are obligated **to lead the body of the dead** from their houses to the grave (Ukaz Sv. Sinoda [Decrees of the Holy Synod], May 1, 1747). While leading the departed from the house to the church and from the church to the cemetery the priests, as directed by the Trebnik, must go¹ ahead of the coffin (by two in a row - the younger in front, seniors near the coffin), but not together with laymen behind the coffin². Members of the Holy Synod in public processions and ceremonies take priority before diocesan Bishops and Archimandrites³ (Ukaz Sv. Sinoda [Decrees of the Holy Synod] 10 Mar. 1725). The body of the departed bishop and priest is taken from the house to the church and from the church to the cemetery in a coffin⁴) by the priests (if there is sufficient number), in carrying forth of banners, the cross and the Gospel⁵, with the ringing of bells⁶ during the burial of the Bishop, - in all the churches of the city, but during the burial of the priest, - only in that church where the body is taken⁷. Before the departed layman it is necessary to carry a large cross (see Deian. Mosk. Sob. [Acts of the Moscow Sobor] 1667, paragraph 33). The coffin of the departed layman whoever he may be, must be carried by laymen, but not clergy⁸ (Treb. P. Mogila; see Izlozhenie Tserkovno-Grazhdanskikh Postanovlenie [Statement of the Church-civil government Regulations], pp. 153, 158; Prakticheskoe Rukovodstvo dlia Sviashchenno Sluzhitelei [Practical Manual for Church Servers], pp. 269-271).

In northeast dioceses **while escorting dead men** to the cemetery the holy icon is carried by any of the laymen⁹, mainly any of their juvenile relatives, but the priest usually accompanies dead men with one censor in the right hand.

In southwest dioceses the big cross, belonging to the church and intended for burial processions, is carried by any of the adult laymen, but the priest accompanies with a lit candle in his right hand and with a small cross in his left, or in the absence of the deacon, with a censor in the right and a lit candle in the left hand, that finds justification for itself in the Old Russian church practice (see in the Trebnik of P. Mogila the drawing at the beginning of "a service of burial of bodies of laymen", but also the Deian. Bol. Mos. Council ch. 2, item 33; see Rukovodstvo dlia Sel'skikh Pastyrei [Manual for Village Pastors] 1888, 20).

Decision of the Holy Synod, 10-12 Feb., 1886, forbids **carrying wreaths** with or without inscriptions when following funeral processions into church for the burial service and to cemeteries for burial, but also equally other signs and emblems which do not have church or official state meaning and to impose strict supervision of this as a duty of the police authorities¹⁰; and, in view of the respect due the dean and holy things in the temples during the burial service of the departed to order the rectors and abbesses of monasteries, but equally both to the rectors of parish churches and the cemetery, in the case of the desire of the relatives of the

departed to place **shrubs and plants** around his coffin in the temple, have care that the placement of these shrubs and plants did not block those praying from the iconostasis and the royal doors at all and did not disturb the clergy during the burial service¹¹. In 1884 according to the military department the order of the Minister of War from now on prohibits **the use of military music** at burials of non-military persons. The Holy Synod decided to declare this through publishing in the "Church Bulletin" (see 1884, 22), having thus invited the diocesan bishop and in particular parish priests that they, within the church authority belonging to everyone, eliminated the use of music while doing the burial service, explaining that the music, which is not used in the Orthodox Church service, should also not be used during the religious rite of burial (Opr. Sv. Sin. [Decrees of the Holy Synod] 2 Apr. - 11 May 1884, No. 859).

At the dead man's escort from church to the cemetery in the Kiev diocese, **the priest**, having in his left hand a cross with candles and in his right a censer, **on the way reads the requiem beginning** (the position at requiem liturgies on week days or at the burial of priests) the holy gospel (see Rukovodstvo dlia Sel'skikh Pastyrei [Manual for Village Pastors] 1889, 32), saying then the short requiem ektenia. In Kiev such a stop happens before each church on the way, at intersections and before going up to the cemetery "Mount of Olives". This local custom, old in the southwest region, is also strictly observed by the Orthodox population. The existing service of the burial of the departed is illegal, and it should not be entered where it is not accepted is why it also is unknown in Great Russia where the dead man is mostly escorted, without the cross and the Holy Gospel, but only with the censer (Rukovodstvo dlia Sel'skikh Pastyrei [Manual for Village Pastors] 1886, 18, 29). In the opinion of the "Tserkovnyi Vestnik [Church Messenger]" as under the charter it is necessary during the transfer of the departed to the place of burial to sing "Holy God", then to read the Gospel at this time and it is impossible to replace the appointed hymns with this reading; requirements of the Ustav [charter] makes historical sense; they need to subordinate our personal reasons, according to the measure of opportunity, and to follow them during the Church service departure (Tserkovnyi Viestnik [Church Messenger] 1886, 46; see also 1891, 41; 1898, 1).

¹ According to the explanation "of the Tserkovnyi Vestnik [Church Messenger]", priests, in view of the above-stated decree of the Holy Synod on May 1, 1747, by all means have to, without any special requests from relatives of the departed, go to their houses for carrying out the body of the departed and **to lead the departed** from the house to the church and then from the church to the cemetery, without hesitating because of distance and other circumstances (Tserkovnyi Viestnik [Church Messenger] 1890, 30; 1894, 26; 1895, 9, 23; refer to 1893, 6).

On the basis of the same decree of the Holy Synod the Tula diocesan administration in 1897 decided to confirm to the church clergy of the diocese that they, under fear of a strict liability, neither under any pretext to evade leading the bodies of the deceased, but also to forbid deacons to replace absent priests by themselves and individually without a priest to lead the dead to the cemetery (Tul'skiia Eparkhial'niia Vedomosti [Tula Diocesan News] 1897, 9).

Other priests, leading bodies of the dead to the cemetery, follow in funeral processions in vehicles, dressed in church vestments and with candles in hand. Such leading the departed by the priests to the cemetery is opposed to the church canons and is

extremely not appropriate. In some dioceses attention is already paid to this and it is strictly forbidden by the diocesan authority. So, the Tula Theological Consistory decided the following on the given subject.

From "A service for departed lay bodies", by the way, it is apparent that the body of the departed is carried out by the priest, after the completion of the Litiya, from the house to the temple where the burial service is made, but then it is led to the cemetery, for the giving to the earth, "to all the people present, led by the priests"; therefore by church ceremonies the priests have a direct duty to go before the coffin, but not ride in a vehicle. Such type of escort of the departed, consecrated by the ancient Christian Church, fully answers the meaning of the rite of burial, served with the evident expression of prayerful mood and Christian expectations of the relatives and acquaintances of the departed. Therefore the priests go "with candles", but in other places will carry out for this purpose from the churches icons and banners, as during religious processions. During such given information the clergy, obliged to care in every possible way for the maintenance in Christians of the prayerful mood, greatly sin in the temptation of conveying the departed in vehicles that is settling in believers: "woe to that person, from whom temptation comes". Under the decree of the Holy Synod, May 1, 1747, priests are obligated to lead the departed on foot to the grave. The clergy of the diocese must sacredly and strictly observe the statute requirements and consecrated ancient customs during the commission of the ceremonies and prayers of the Orthodox Church, under the fear of opposite responsibility (Tul'skiia Eparkhial'niia Vedomosti [Tula Diocesan News] 1894, 17; see also the Vyatka Eparkhial'niia Vedomosti [Vyatka Diocesan News] 1879, 9).

During the conveying the body wires of the departed (as well as generally during the church service departure in the open air) the use of black skufias is permitted to all priests (Opr. Sv. Sin. [Decrees of the Holy Synod], 13 Mar. - 6 Jun. 1890, No. 585).

To demand a payment for the farewell of the deceased is not only not desirable, but in any measure the clergy have no right and must be content only with voluntary gifts (Tserkovnyi Viestnik [Church Messenger] 1895, 9, 23); and besides these gifts fall to the brotherly circle if they arrive for all the clergy, but not to each person (Tserkovniia Vedomosti [Church News] 1895, 51-52).

² **The custom of clergy walking behind the coffin** occurred in article XVII article in some places. Metr. P. Mogila, rising against it, says that this custom "is not Christian, but Jewish and Agarian, which is like a dead belief, will eternally follow the dead person". During the transportation of the departed, priests need to go before the coffin: "as all Christians living on earth, the priest, in teaching the faith and fulfilling the commandments of God and in all virtues, are leaders, if also after death go before them, as the greater temerity more laymen are prayed to the Lord for it" (Trebn. of Metr. P. Mogila).

³ **In St. Petersburg it is forbidden** to carry bodies of the dead for burial past the Winter Palace (Svod Zakonov [Code of Laws], vol. XIII, Ustav Vrachebnii [Physician's Charter (Ustav)], art. 711, publ. 1892).

⁴ During the **burial of the bishop** there is that feature that while carrying his body to the grave, they carry it around the temple, and while carrying they do a short Litiya on each side of the temple. So, before the burial of the body of Metropolitan Philaret of Moscow (1867, 28 Nov.), they carried it around the Trinity Cathedral and brought it to the building under construction in the name of righteous Philaret (Chten. Imp. Obshch. Ist. and Drevn. [Readings in the Imperial Society of History and Antiquity], 1876, book 4); the body of the bishop of Ostrog Hierotheos was carried (1871, Apr. 21) around the monastic church (Volynskii Eparkhial'niia Vedomosti [Volynia Diocesan News] 1871, 10; Posobiye k Izucheniyu Usatava Bogoslužhenia Pravoslavnoi Tserkvi [Manual for the Study of the Ustav of the Divine Services of the Orthodox Church], p. 740; see also Tserkovniia Vedomosti [Church News] 1898, 50).

The specified custom of carrying the coffin around the temple is also applied at the burial of archimandrites, but also in other places, especially in villages, and at the burial of priests (Tserkovnyi Viestnik [Church Messenger] 1899, 26). Some relate the specified carrying of the departed priest to carrying the shroud at the end of matins of Holy Saturday, - on the basis that according to the "Office" the burial of priests requires the singing of the irmoses of Holy Saturday, and that the priest, being on the earth the one who continues the deeds of Christ, more than once during his service it represents him as the person of the very Lord Jesus Christ (for more information see the Rukovodstvo dlia Sel'skikh Pastyrei [Manual for Village Pastors] 1893, 12). But for specified similarities the above presented reasons do not give sufficient grounds, but therefore cannot serve as the excuse for carrying the remains of the priest around the temple after the burial (see (Tserkovnyi Viestnik [Church Messenger] Ts. V. 1894, 36). In view of this, in those places where the specified custom exists, this or that relation towards him depends on the view of this by the local diocesan government. As for those places where, at burial of priests, the specified carrying the coffin around the temple was not accepted, then the priests doing a priest's burial is self-willed and should not enter such feature into the office of the specified burial.

⁵ At the carrying out of the bodies of deceased bishops, priests and monks are sung **chants**, specified in the Trebnik: at the carrying out of the bishop and priest - irmoses of a great canon: "A Helper and Protector", but at the carrying out of the monk is the stichera: "What sweetness of life". - Refer to pp. 1227 and 1228 above.

⁶ At carrying out of bodies of deceased bishops and priests to the temple **the perezvon** is the same as done for burial service and to a grave after burial service in churches during the carrying out of the cross on September 14, on August 1, and on the Veneration of the Cross Sunday and while carrying out the shroud on Good Friday; after carrying the body into the temple, then after

the reading of the prayer of absolution and after committing the body to the grave there is a trezvon (Posobiye k Izucheniyu Usatava Bogoslužhenia Pravoslavnoi Tserkvi [Manual for the Study of the Ustav of the Divine Services of the Orthodox Church], pp. 38-39; Tserkovniia Vedomosti [Church News] 1896, 40; refer to 1898, 50, pp. 1931, 1934), in witness that a finger of the earth was returned to its native earth (Rukovodstvo dlia Sel'skikh Pastyrei [Manual for Village Pastors] 1893, 12).

This perezvon and trezvon are done during burial of appointed persons even in the first week of Great Lent (Tserkovnyi Viestnik [Church Messenger] 1892, 19).

⁷ Before each temple which the coffin passes, the procession stops and the requiem Litiya is done (Rukovodstvo dlia Sel'skikh Pastyrei [Manual for Village Pastors] 1893, 12).

⁸ During the burial of laymen the perezvon is not necessary (Tserkovnyi Viestnik [Church Messenger] 1892, 19; 1893, 38; 1897, 41; Tserkovniia Vedomosti [Church News] 1896, 1, 40); therefore where there was no custom to follow **during the burial of laymen**, it is also impossible for the parish priest to drop **the perezvon** by his authority. But there are districts (in the south) where, from ancient times, the usage remains - at the carrying out, the burial service and the conveying of those who lie asleep in the Lord to the cemetery to slowly strike the bell (see Tserkovnyi Viestnik [Church Messenger], 1894, 49), and this, as far as we know, is not forbidden by the local diocesan administration there; after this even the parish priest of such districts, without the will of his administration, does not have to eradicate this custom.

It appears to be unaffected even by weakening of this custom; as it is necessary to agree with what they hold to, that the specified knell acts for the living, who wallowed in earthly vanity, as the sound of the trumpet of the Archangel calling to judgment, that you involuntarily have listened to it, its end and will involuntarily pray for those reposed, though it would be altogether other; but therefore it is very much a pity that this fine usage is not always everywhere observed (Belyustin, p. 245); especially that custom deserves sympathy to which in some places at the death of each Orthodox Christian it is accepted to strike the bell of the parish temple (see note 2 on p. 1195 above); only during the spread of epidemic diseases, when frequent cases of death even strengthens the panic by itself is so pernicious for the living, it would seem more expedient not to do the specified ring (refer to Tserkovnyi Viestnik [Church Messenger] 1894, 49).

According to the explanation of the "Rukovodstvo dlia Sel'skikh Pastyrei [Manual for Village Pastors]" to make a sad funeral knell, while doing the burial on Monday and other days of the Paschal Week, would be not in compliance with the character of these days "gladness and joy, but not lamentation" owing to that these days burials are even done to a special office, excluding grief and lamentation for the dead (Rukovodstvo dlia Sel'skikh Pastyrei [Manual for Village Pastors] 1888, 44).

In the opinion "of the Tserkovnyi Vestnik [Church Messenger]", the income from the ringing of the bell for the dead (of course where this ringing is accepted by custom) would be necessary to use for the Psalm reader (Tserkovnyi Viestnik [Church Messenger] 1893, 10); according to an explanation of the "Tserkovniia Vedomosti [Church News]", this income is not established by anybody and it is necessary to refuse to accept it (Tserkovniia Vedomosti [Church News] 1895, 46). In some dioceses the local diocesan administration made special resolutions concerning this income.

Thus, the Chernigov Theological Consistory determined that "bell ringing money" everywhere be turned into the church treasury and are written down in the receipts book with reporting on the general basis; a record of them according to the receipts books has to be made every month, but for the daily record of their receipts have to be brought into special notebooks for the counter signature of the dean, and the duty of the latter was assigned during the semi-annual audits of churches to have special supervision over the correct receipts and record of this church income, each time comparing their record in the notebooks to the metrical records of the departed; together with this, it was not cancelled and the order of the Chernigov Diocese to transfer half of the bell ringing money for the needs of church schools of districts; the expenditure of the other half of this money be accepted in the general record of the expenditures of church funds (Chernigovskiiia Eparkhial'niia Vedomosti [Chernigov Diocesan News] 1897, 19).

⁹ In some districts relatives of the departed, after his burial, **leave the small icon in the church**. This custom has nothing for or against itself, but therefore it is not necessary to promote or to prohibit it (Tserkovnyi Viestnik [Church Messenger] 1890, 15).

¹⁰ **It is ordered** for the offices of the capital **police** to accept for management the following instruction: 1) carrying wreaths is certainly forbidden at any funeral procession; 2) the placing of wreaths on the grave is not forbidden under that condition that there be no inscriptions on the wreaths placed on the coffins nor that the emblems be buried, and 3) at the difficulty to lay wreaths on the

coffin, whether in the case of the large size of the wreath, or in the case of their abundance, wreaths may be sent directly to the cemetery completely separate from the procession and there assigned to the grave of the departed (see *Prakticheskoe Rukovodstvo dlia Sviashchenno Sluzhitelei* [Practical Manual for Church Servers], p. 271).

At the present time, as the "Tserkovnyi Vestnik [Church Messenger]" claims: in the capitals all assigned wreaths (if there are many) are carried on special vehicles, behind the coffin (Tserkovnyi Viestnik [Church Messenger] 1893, 45; 1894, 10).

¹¹Ancient Christians were not quite alien to the **custom to decorate coffins, graves and bodies of the departed with flowers** and plants, but they used this decoration only "for encouragement", as St. Cyprian says, "for evangelical virtue", to honor the moral dignity of the departed or for the symbolical expression of the idea of resurrection, eternal life, heavenly reward, etc., carefully eliminating everything that had no purely Christian religious moral character and which carried a print of pagan superstition. Subsequently the considered custom found a larger application and distribution among Christians in the West, but closer to our time, in imitation of the gentiles, entered our use, though it found sympathy and application only in some classes of our society. Having accepted our extreme measures, this custom began to serve only for celebration of terrestrial life of the departed, diverting thereby the "attention of believers from the thought of death and eternity to the vanity of terrestrial life, instead of prayerful tenderness, consolation, edification feeding vanity, and quite often leading the needy to ruinous competition with rich". In particular this began to be found when following funeral processions in church for the burial service and to the cemetery for burial, accepting sometimes the "character of a secular demonstration" and seductive for pious people, accustomed to meet a funeral procession with respect and prayer for the reposed person. That is why the Holy Synod in 1886 also issued the resolution directed to restriction of this custom by our church deanery as violating and seductive for the religious feeling and morality of the people (for more information see the *Rukovodstvo dlia Sel'skikh Pastyrei* [Manual for Village Pastors] 1887, 7, 8; Tserkovnyi Viestnik [Church Messenger] 1886, 12).

*S. V. Bulgakov, "Handbook for Church Servers", 2nd ed., 1274 pp. (Kharkov, 1900) pp. 1228-1232.
Translated by Archpriest Eugene D. Tarris on January 3, 2015 © All rights reserved.*