

Filipino Funeral Practices

Difference Between Filipino Mourning and Western Mourning



Western funerals requires silence and stiff decorum; they require that the privacy of the bereaved be respected since they are supposed to want to be alone and includes a suspension of all references to the material facts of every day for example food and money. The Filipinos "*paglalamay*" or "vigil", on the other hand, is the exact opposite of this. In the Philippines, the body of the deceased is laid out in a coffin, placed in the funeral parlor or in the family's house, the relatives gather, people come and go, express condolences and contribute money for the funeral expenses. There is hustle and bustle of activities, people standing by and gossiping; young boys and girls play word games and flirt at the door; there's gambling tables set up and food served, with general merriment, singing and guitar-playing going on throughout the night.

Westerners handling of bereavement requires that the bereaved person should not be reminded of what has happened, not be asked to talk about it. Tact requires that the name of the deceased person be mentioned only with extreme circumspect, that the details be glossed over, and the emotions not re-aroused. Filipino way of handling bereavement is exactly the opposite. Filipinos would express sympathy and concern by asking specific factual questions and the primary assumption about those who have suffered a loss is that they do not want to be left alone and that they need friends and families for support. A Westerner should not be scandalized if a Filipino starts asking detailed facts about the dead such as "How did he die?", "Did he suffer much?", "How much did you spend at the hospital?", etc. This is the Filipino's way of saying "We were so sorry for your loss". In this way he is genuinely trying to express concern and affection.

Filipino Respect for the Dead

Filipinos are very reverent of the dead. A loss is met by an outpouring of love, colorful funeral ceremonies and rituals. A typical Filipino wake or vigil for a dead loved-one lasts between 5-7 days and sometimes longer especially for those with relatives outside the country who of course flies home for the interment. Filipinos pay much respect to their dead. They believe in life after death. Notice of death of a loved one is spread to relatives and friends by word of mouth or through obituaries. Families are expected to come together on this sad times and give each other support. Friends condole with the family of the deceased and give monetary contributions in condolence and keep vigil until the burial day.

The Wake Or Vigil for the Deceased

The vigils to the dead is held either in the funeral parlor of the family home until the day of the interment. This is where the family receives friends and relative who want to pay their respect to the deceased. Whether it be in the house or funeral parlor, the body of the deceased is usually placed in a coffin with plenty of lights and flowers around. These wakes are usually served by funeral parlors and directors. They provide the casket, lights and arrange for service vehicles in the funeral processions. There is also a provided registry book where visitors can sign and a contribution box or dish beside it.

The signatures in the registry are always formal, including their titles and addresses and a space for short messages that they want to give to the bereaved family. The registry is given to the family after the funeral so they will be able to send thank you cards to those who have stayed with them in their sad times.

When one does not personally know the deceased, but only his close relatives, flowers may be sent to them, with a card addressed to the family on which is written "with sympathy" or "with deepest sympathy" or, if appropriate, "with love and sympathy". Some people would also send prayer and mass cards to the family which means they have offered a mass or prayer in a local church for the repose of the soul of the deceased.

In the provinces and in some cases also in cities, families keep vigil for their dead in the family home. This is more private than in funeral homes and expenses are less. Relatives and friends stay overnight until the time of burial.

In a Filipino wake it is always made sure that the vigil goes on 24 hours a day. People (meaning family and friends) take turns watching vigil over the deceased. Visitors can turn up anytime of the day or night and stays for a long time so the house and funeral parlor

are kept open and well lit at all times. Food and refreshments is served round the clock to people making vigil. Novenas and rosary prayers are also held every night during this time.

These practice might sound very peculiar to Westerners especially in the countries who do not hold vigils to the dead like in the UK. I was quite surprised that when my brother-in-law died they kept him at the mortuary for almost 2 weeks until the day of the funeral. My husband and in-laws did not even opt to view the body for a minute. When I asked my mother-in-law, she explained that the person at the mortuary is not her son anymore. She believes her son is in heaven already and the body of a deceased person reverts back to being a "thing", just a mere representation of the person it use to be.

Filipino Funeral

On the day of the funeral, a procession is held with the families and friends walking behind the funeral car. They will stop first at the church where a Holy Mass will be celebrated. After the Mass, a representative fo the bereaved family makes a speech reminiscing a little about everything good in the deceased's life, afterwards he thanks everyone who have supported them in their time of sorrow. In Protestant churches services are held with singing of hymns and prayers and rituals read by the ministers. All members of the family of the deceased and close friends are expected to attend the funeral. After the Mass, everyone follows the funeral procession to the grave site where they stay until the body is interred. Family and friends of the deceased may choose to wear either something colored white or black. These days white has become the acceptable color while the widow or widower wears black. When one wears white, they wear a small black rectangular pin on their chest as a sign that they are in mourning.

Filipino Mourning Practices

After the funeral Catholics hold nightly prayers at home for the dead for nine consecutive days. On the last night, the bereaved family invite all relatives and friends to a sumptuous meal in celebration of the end of the novena. This is believed to be the time when the soul of the deceased is with his Maker. Big celebrations such as Weddings, birthday celebrations and other social activities in the bereaved family suspended within a year after the death of a family member as this is still considered as a mourning period. In some particular places, the widow cannot attend any social function for a year.

All Saints Day Celebration

In the Philippines, November 1 & 2 is considered a national holiday for the celebration of All Saints Day and All Souls Day. It is a day set aside for honoring and remembering the dead and keeping vigil at the cemeteries. On the 1st day of November, relatives of the departed flock to the cemeteries bringing with them lighted candles and beautiful flowers and food. The graves are adorned, cleaned and polished the day prior for the family to pay homage to the departed kin. Poorly maintained graves reflect the kin's lack of regard for the dead. Many hold an all-night vigil and light candles over tombstones eating, singing and merrymaking. Usually the whole family of the departed kin including the small children comes over to join in the vigil. Some even consider it a family reunion time. It is usually a happy time because the cemeteries are well-lit the whole night. Families bring tables and chairs, play music for entertainment and others play cards and mahjong the entire time. Some mausoleums of the more affluent families even have their own beds. Children are busy collecting candle wax while youngsters go around to meet other youngsters.

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