

Cremation

(According to the Diocese of Charleston)

The traditional teaching of the Catholic Church with regard to the proper burial of the sacred remains of the deceased and the resurrection of the body on the last day requires periodic catechesis (Catholic teaching). This is especially so today with the ever-increasing number of Catholics choosing cremation.

Until the 1960s, the Catholic Church did not permit its members to be cremated. This prohibition was primarily based upon the Church's tradition of respect for the human body, which, as Saint Paul records in 1 Corinthians 6:19, is "a temple of the Holy Spirit." For this reason, the funeral ritual's introduction makes the point that the human body has been made a temple by the Sacraments it has received through Christ. "Since in Baptism the body was marked with the seal of the Trinity and became the Temple of the Holy Spirit, Christians respect and honor the bodies of the dead and the places where they rest" (Ordo Exsequiarum 19). The body is further made holy through the Sacraments of Holy Communion, through which it is nourished by Christ the Bread of life, and Confirmation, through which the seal of the Holy Spirit is imprinted on the individual.

For these reasons, it is the preference of the Church that, even in cases wherein which cremation is to take place, the body of the deceased be present for the funeral Mass. It is preferred that cremation take place subsequent to the funeral Liturgy, with the remains being properly interred thereafter. Cremated remains are never to be scattered as mere rubbish. As the body is a sacred temple, so also the remains of the individual washed, nourished, and sealed through the Sacraments, are sacred.

Nevertheless in some cases it is not possible for the body of an individual to be present for the funeral Mass and in extenuating circumstances a funeral Mass is permitted in the presence of cremated remains, or cremains. This decision should not be made lightly. The decision for cremation should not be inspired by motives contrary to Christian teaching. Thus financial concerns should not normally dictate choosing the option for cremation.

Guidelines for Cremation

While interment of the body remains the preference of the Church, after the manner of the burial of the Lord Jesus, the use of cremation is allowed according to the following norms. These norms promote the faith and practice of the Church with regard to the burial of a Christian. For the most part, these are already in force according to current liturgical law and the liturgical books. Thus, respect for the remains of the cremated body, as befits the dignity of a baptized person, is ensured.

Norms for funeral rites with cremation:

It is most appropriate that the burial/disposition of the cremated remains immediately follow the Funeral Liturgy. The cremated remains are to be buried in a cemetery or entombed in a mausoleum or columbarium (cf. OCF, no. 417); A mausoleum or columbarium can only be erected where there is already a cemetery (CCL, c. 1242). It is not permitted to scatter cremated remains. The integrity of the cremated remains is always to be respected. The cremated remains of one deceased person may not be mixed with the cremated remains of another person. It is not permitted to divide the cremated remains and retain, inter or entomb them in more than one place. It is also not permitted to divide the cremated remains in such a way that they are contained in lockets or jewelry. Any other practice which violates the integrity of the cremated remains and impedes reverent and proper burial/disposition is prohibited.

Burial at Sea: If burial takes place at sea, the cremated remains are to be in a solid and durable container, and not scattered.