

The Catholic Church and Cremation

In recent years, it has become increasingly common for Catholics to include cremation in their funeral plans. While the Catholic Church tolerates cremation, she also teaches that cremated remains should be treated with the same dignity as any other of the deceased. Therefore, cremated remains should be buried in a cemetery. To clarify any misunderstandings regarding the Church's teaching, the following points were compiled from the Catechism of the Catholic Church and a 2016 instruction of Pope Francis regarding the burial of the deceased and the conservation of the ashes in the case of cremation. May the Church's teachings here presented help you and your loved ones plan for the day on which Our Lord calls each of us to Himself.



Q: How does the Church understand death?

A: Death is the end of earthly life, when the soul is separated from the body. But death was not a part of God's original plan; death is a consequence of sin. Death entered the world on account of man's sin. And yet, death is transformed by Christ. Jesus, the Son of God, also himself suffered the death that is part of the human condition. Yet, despite his anguish as he faced death, he accepted it in an act of complete and free submission to his Father's will. The obedience of Jesus has transformed the curse of death into a blessing, and by entering the tomb, he has hallowed the tombs of the dead.

Q: What is the Resurrection of the Body?

A: The resurrection of Jesus is the culminating truth of the Christian faith, preached as an essential part of the Paschal Mystery from the very beginnings of Christianity. By death the soul is separated from the body, but in the resurrection God will give incorruptible life to our body, transformed by reunion with our soul. The confidence of Christians is the resurrection of the dead. In death, the separation of the soul from the body, the human body decays and the soul goes to meet God, while awaiting its reunion with its glorified body.

Q: Does the Church permit cremation?

A: Yes, the Church does permit cremation. However, given our hope in the Resurrection of the Body, the Church cautions the faithful to avoid practices which might contradict that hope. She does not permit cremation meant as a rejection of the Resurrection of the Body. Moreover, she cannot condone attitudes or permit rites that involve erroneous ideas about death, such as considering death as the definitive annihilation of the person, or the moment of fusion with Mother Nature or the universe, or as a stage in the cycle of

regeneration, or as the definitive liberation from the “prison” of the body. Cremated remains should be treated with the same dignity as any other body of the deceased.

Q: Why does the Church insist upon burial in a sacred place?

A: By burying the bodies of the faithful, the Church confirms her faith in the Resurrection of the Body and intends to show the great dignity of the human body as an integral part of the human person whose body forms part of their identity. The Church insists upon burial for several reasons:

- **The reservation of the ashes of the departed in a sacred place ensures that they are not excluded from the prayers and remembrance of their family or the Christian community.**
- **It prevents the faithful departed from being forgotten, or their remains from being shown a lack of respect, which eventuality is possible, most especially once the immediately subsequent generation has too passed away.**
- Christ has hallowed the grave by his own three days in the tomb. Cemeteries, in this way, are places of prayer and hopeful anticipation of the Resurrection.
- Also, it prevents any unfitting or superstitious practices.

Q: Does the Church permit the faithful to keep the remains of their loved ones in their homes?

A: The Church does not permit this practice except in grave and exceptional cultural circumstances and with the permission of the Bishop and the Local Bishops' Conference. This practice is not permitted in the United States.

Q: Can I divide cremated remains among my family?

A: In order to maintain the integrity of the body, the division of the remains is not permitted. The Church insists that cremated remains be maintained in their entirety in a cemetery or sacred place.

Q: Can I scatter cremated remains?

A: In order that every appearance of pantheism, naturalism or nihilism be avoided, it is not permitted to scatter the ashes of the faithful departed in the air, on land, at sea or in some other way. These courses of action cannot be legitimized by an appeal to the sanitary, social, or economic motives that may have occasioned the choice of cremation.

Q: Can I turn cremated remains into jewelry or some other memento?

A: Cremated remains may not be preserved in mementos, pieces of jewelry or other objects. These courses of action cannot be legitimized by an appeal to the sanitary, social, or economic motives that may have occasioned the choice of cremation.