

QUESTIONS CONCERNING CREMATION, THE FUNERAL LITURGY, AND THE CATHOLIC CHURCH

The Church and Cremation

As a Catholic may I be cremated?

Yes. The Church's definite preference is for burial of the body. However, since 1963 cremation has been permitted, although the cremated remains were not allowed to be present during the funeral mass. In 1997 the Vatican gave the bishops of the United States permission to allow the celebration of the funeral mass with the cremated remains present, provided the local bishop permits it.

Do I need to ask permission to be cremated?

No, but it is a good idea to discuss your reasons with your pastor. For a funeral mass with the cremated remains present, the local bishop needs to give his permission.

Cremation

When should cremation take place?

The Church strongly prefers that cremation take place *after* the full funeral liturgy with the body. The presence of the body most clearly brings to mind the life and death of the person and better expresses the values that the Church affirms in its rites.

This is the body once washed in Baptism, anointed with the oil of salvation, and fed with the Bread of Life. This is the body whose hands clothed the poor and embraced the sorrowing. ... Thus, the Church's reverence and care for the body grows out of a reverence and concern for the person whom

the Church now commends to the care of God. ... However, when circumstances prevent the presence of the body at the funeral liturgy ... it is appropriate that the cremated remains of the body be present for the full course of the funeral rites, including the Vigil for the Deceased, the Funeral Liturgy, and the Rite of Committal. The funeral liturgy should always be celebrated in a church. (Reflections on the Body, Cremation, and Catholic Funeral Rites, Bishops' Committee on the Liturgy)

Is it necessary to embalm?

When cremation follows the funeral liturgy, embalming is usually necessary. When cremation is to follow soon after death, embalming is not necessary. Each state has its own regulations in this matter, but generally the rule is that a deceased human body that is not buried or cremated within 24 or 48 hours is to be embalmed or refrigerated. However, simple embalming and the use of a cremation casket need not involve excessive costs.

Is it necessary to purchase a casket?

No, it is not necessary to purchase a casket for cremation. The only thing required is a simple container in which the body can be transported and placed in the cremation chamber. If you choose to have the body present for Mass, with cremation to follow, rental is an option. Many funeral directors offer regular caskets for rent, as well as the special cremation or shell caskets which you may purchase.

Careful Handling and Proper Interment of Cremated Remains

What is the proper container for cremated remains?

Appropriate, worthy containers (not necessarily expensive) such as a classic urn are proper for the cremated remains. At the present time the U.S. Bishops' Committee on the Liturgy has determined only what is *not* a proper container. Although jewelry, dishes, statuary and space capsules are examples of designer containers now being offered, they are *unacceptable* in Catholic funeral practices. It is also *unacceptable* to have cremated remains made into jewelry, dishes and the like.

How are cremated remains transported?

Transportation of cremated remains is a matter of personal choice. Individuals personally carrying a deceased person's ashes will often have the added responsibility of packing and transporting the urn. Using the principle of respect for the

body, you may wrap the container of cremated remains with the possibility of sending it as accompanying baggage or take it along as carry-on luggage. Ask the airline office or the state's Department of Public Health for specific information about your region of travel before preparing the cremated remains for transport by air. Where no legal regulations exist regarding transport of cremated remains, most cremationists ship cremated remains in a standard shipping container by U.S. Mail or other common carriers.

Must cremated remains be buried/entombed?

Yes. Respectful final disposition of cremated remains involves interment or entombment. Burial options include a *family grave* in a cemetery marked with a traditional memorial stone or an *urn garden*, a special section in a cemetery with small, pre-dug graves for urns.

What is a columbarium?

A common practice is the entombment of the cremated remains in a *columbarium*. It is an arrangement of niches, either in a mausoleum, a room or wall into which an urn or other worthy vessel is placed for permanent memorial.

May I scatter the cremated remains?

No. *The practice of scattering cremated remains on the sea, from the air, or on the ground, or keeping cremated remains in the home of a relative or friend of the deceased are not the reverent disposition that the Church requires. (Order of Christian Funerals, Appendix II #417)* Burial at sea of cremated remains differs from scattering. An appropriate and worthy container, heavy enough to be sent to its final resting place, may be dropped into the sea. (See *Order of Christian Funerals, #406.4*) Please consult your local government for environmental regulations.

May anything be added to cremated remains such as the cremated remains of other persons, pets, other objects?

The principle of respect for the cremated remains of a deceased Christian embraces the deeper belief in the individuality of each baptized person before God. Throughout history, the mingling of remains has never been an accepted practice, except in extraordinary circumstances.