

# Office for Worship

## Principles Regarding Cremation

### Reverence for the Sacredness of the Human Body

Because the human body is integral to the human person, it is difficult to think of a person apart from their body. "Thus, the Roman Catholic 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."

The long-standing practice of burying the body of the deceased in a grave or tomb continues to be encouraged as a sign of Christian faith. However, the church does not forbid cremation as a means of disposition of the body, unless it has been chosen for reasons which are contrary to church teaching.

### Preference for the Presence of the Body

The body of a deceased loved one forcefully brings to mind the mystery of life and death. As Christians, the body of the deceased speaks also to our belief that we are destined for future glory at the resurrection of the dead.

Therefore "the church clearly prefers and urges that the body of the deceased be present for its funeral rites, since the presence of the human body better expresses the values which the church affirms in its rites."

### Funeral Rites

When cremation is chosen, the church prefers that the body be cremated after the funeral, thus allowing for the presence of the body at the Funeral Mass. When circumstances require it, however, cremation and committal may take place even before the funeral liturgy.

All the usual rites which are celebrated in the presence of the body of the deceased may also be celebrated in the presence of the cremated remains.

The primary symbols of the Roman Catholic funeral liturgy are retained even when the funeral liturgy is celebrated in the presence of the cremated remains. The remains should be treated with the same dignity and respect as the body.

They may be carried in procession and/or placed on a table where the coffin normally would be. The paschal candle and sprinkling with holy water are primary symbols of baptism and should be used during the Funeral Mass.

However, the pall is not used. Photographs and other mementos may be used at the vigil, but are not appropriate for the Mass.

### Final Disposition and Memorialization of the Cremated Remains

"Cremated remains may be buried in a grave, entombed in a mausoleum or columbarium or even buried at sea." The practice of scattering cremated remains on the sea, from the air, or on the ground is not permitted.

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Likewise, "keeping cremated remains in the home of a relative or friend of the deceased are not the reverent disposition that the church requires."

The principle of respect for the cremated remains of a deceased Christian mirrors the respect afforded their body. The body is always laid to rest with solemnity and dignity.

*~ All references taken from the Order of Christian Funerals, Appendix: Cremation; 1997.*