

CREMATION AND THE TEACHINGS OF THE HOLY ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH

When a loved one goes on to be with the Lord, many decisions need to be made regarding the care and burial of the body. While most families opt to have a traditional funeral, others prefer to have their loved ones cremated. This is perfectly acceptable. However, there are certain teachings that we must adhere to.

“The Church’s belief in the sacredness of the human body and the resurrection of the dead has traditionally found expression in the care taken to prepare the bodies of the deceased for burial.”

“This is the body once washed in baptism, anointed with oil of salvation, and fed with the bread of life. This is the body whose hands clothed the poor and embraced the sorrowing. Indeed, the human body is so inextricably associated with the human person that the care of the body grows out of a reverence and concern for the person whom the Church now commends to the care of God.”

Thus, while “cremation is now permitted, it does not enjoy the same value as burial of the body. The Church clearly prefers and urges that the body of the deceased be present for the funeral rites, since the presence of the human body better expresses the values which the Church affirms in its rites.” However, “when extraordinary circumstances make cremation of a body the only feasible choice, pastoral sensitivity must be exercised by all who minister to the family of the deceased.”

The rites of burial for the cremated remains of a body may be found in the appendix to the *Order of Christian Funerals*. This appendix recommends that when cremation is chosen, the body be cremated after the funeral, thus allowing for the presence of the body at the Funeral Mass. When pastoral circumstances require it, however, cremation and committal may take place even before the Funeral liturgy.

Any catechesis on the subject of cremation should emphasize that “the cremated remains of a body should be treated with the same respect given to the corporeal remains of a human body. This includes the use of a worthy vessel to contain the

ashes, the manner in which they are carried, the care and attention to appropriate placement and transport, and the final disposition.”

While 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 or keeping cremated remains in the home of a relative or friend of the deceased are not the reverent disposition that the Church requires.”