



Resource for Catholic Funerals: Cremation

In recent years, Catholic funeral practices have been impacted by the increasing popularity of cremation as a means of providing for the final disposition of the body. As a result, a number of burial practices have been embraced by some Catholics which are not permitted according to the “Order of Christian Funerals.” In order to help in funeral planning and allow you to follow the teachings of the Catholic Church, please review the following principles regarding Cremation in the Catholic Church.

On March 21, 1997, the Holy See granted an indult to *The Order of Christian Funerals*, giving permission to the U.S. Latin-rite bishops to allow the celebration of the funeral liturgy in the presence of cremated remains. This practice was never intended to be viewed as an “equally” good alternative to the traditional funeral rites of the Church which entail the burial of the body intact. Permission to cremate and to celebrate the funeral liturgy in the presence of cremated remains was intended to be granted on a case-by-case basis. At St. Boniface Church, the pastor will determine what is appropriate in each given situation.



Whenever a family chooses cremation over traditional burial, families should be made aware of the preference to honor the body **before** cremation.

On October 4, 1997, the appendix to *The Order of Christian Funerals* was published for use in the funeral rites involving the presence of the cremated remains. At St. Boniface Parish, the Pastor and/or Deacon, for pastoral reasons, may permit the funeral liturgy to be celebrated in the presence of the cremated remains. However, the following should always be observed:

- The remains should be placed in a worthy vessel.
- The paschal candle should be placed in a prominent position as it is when the body is present for a funeral.
- Explicit references to baptism must be omitted when blessing the cremated remains.
- A white cloth should *not* be used to cover the cremated remains, as this mimics the practice of draping the funeral pall upon the body which clearly connects the body to baptism.
- The cremains may be incensed out of respect for the deceased’s cremated body.
- The cremated remains may be sprinkled with holy water.



When cremation of the body is chosen, the Church still 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. As mentioned above, most of 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 cremains may be carried in procession and/or placed on a table where the casket normally would be. Photographs and other mementos may be used at the vigil and cemetery, but are not appropriate at the Mass.

The cremated remains of the deceased must be given the same respect as a body is given during the Rite of Committal. A worthy vessel must carry the cremated remains of the deceased to the place of internment. The cremated remains should be buried in a grave or entombed in a mausoleum or columbarium. The practice of scattering ashes over the sea, on the ground, or from the air is not permitted for Catholics and is not considered to be the reverent disposition of the cremated remains.

The cremated remains may be buried at sea as long as they are intact and placed in a worthy vessel that will carry the remains to the bottom of the sea bed. Burial of cremated remains at sea should observe all applicable Federal and State laws and regulations.

PLEASE NOTE

Catholics should never retain the cremated remains in their homes, places of work, or any other personal space. Neither should Catholics divide and share the cremated remains of the deceased. The Church requires that the cremated remains be buried or placed in a recognized area of reverence for the dead. If the final disposition of the cremated remains does not take place according to the teaching of the Church with reverence and in a sacred place, the remains should not be brought into the Church for the Funeral Liturgy.