

Burial & Cremation Guidelines

Why does the church insistently recommend burial in a cemetery or other sacred place?

- Burial in a cemetery or another sacred place adequately corresponds to the piety and respect owed to the bodies of the faithful departed who through Baptism have become temples of the Holy Spirit.
- 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.
- The burial of the faithful departed in cemeteries or other sacred places encourages family members and the whole Christian community to pray for and remember the dead.

Is cremation permitted in the Catholic church?

- Cremation is permitted provided that this choice has not been made through “a denial of Christian dogmas, the animosity of a secret society, or hatred of the Catholic religion and the Church”.
- Cremation is permitted for reasons of sanitary, economic, or social considerations.
- The Church continues to prefer the practice of burying the bodies of the deceased, because this shows a greater esteem towards the deceased.
- Although cremation is now permitted by the Church, 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 those rites”
- The church’s guidelines for cremation must be followed.

What are the guidelines for cremation?

- Ideally, the cremation would take place at some time after the Funeral Mass, so that there can be an opportunity for the Vigil for the Deceased in the presence of the body (during “visitation” or “viewing” at a church or funeral home).
- When cremation takes place before the Funeral Mass, and the diocesan bishop permits the presence of cremated remains at the Funeral Mass, adapted texts are used for the rituals.

- The cremated remains of a body should be treated with the same respect given to the human body from which they come.
- A worthy vessel should be used to contain the ashes
- Care and respect should be used in the manner in which they are carried, and the care and attention to appropriate placement and transport.
- The cremated remains should be buried in a grave or entombed in a mausoleum or columbarium.
- ***It is not permitted to scatter the ashes of the faithful departed in the air, on land, at sea or in some other way, nor may they be preserved in mementos, pieces of jewelry or other objects.***
- ***It is not permitted to keep the remains on the home of a relative or friend.***

Why should the body be present at the funeral Mass and the ashes be buried?

- The body should be present for the Funeral Mass to allow for the appropriate reverence for the sacredness of the body at the Funeral Mass: sprinkling with holy water, the placing of the pall, and honoring it with incense.
- 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.
- The practice of scattering cremated remains, preserving them in mementos, or keeping them in the home are not the reverent disposition that the Church requires.

Information was obtained from *Ad resurgendum cum Christo*, a document issued by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith in 2016, and the USCCB website.