

Catholics and Cremation

The death of a loved one is one of the most profoundly sorrowful moments in our lives. All major religions of the world have ways of ritually expressing the reality of death. The recent Vatican document, *Instruction Ad resurgendum cum Christo*, granted by Pope Francis, states that, “from earliest times, Christians have desired that the faithful departed become the objects of the Christian community’s prayer and remembrance. Their tombs have become places of prayer, remembrance and reflection. Those who have died remain part of the Church who believes “in the communion of all the faithful in Christ”.

Over the course of centuries, some long held customs and practices have changed, in both society and in our religious traditions. In our own Roman Catholic tradition, with the tremendous gift of the Second Vatican Council, we have experienced the Church “reading the signs of the time”. While our experiences of worship have been revised in both language and in ritual action, what is unchanged in our tradition is the respect for human life that the Church continues to faithfully call for. This is very evident in the way that the Church commemorates the death of one of its members.

The Order of Christian Funerals, the Church’s official ritual book, envisions three ritual moments to be celebrated when a Catholic dies: Funeral Vigil, Funeral Liturgy (with or without Mass, depending on the circumstances), and Committal (burial or entombment). The celebration of these rites is intended to bring hope and consolation to those who mourn.

In the Introduction of the Order of Christian Funerals, we read that, “Christians celebrate the funeral rites to offer worship, praise and thanksgiving to God for the gift of a life which has now been returned to God”.

The **Funeral Vigil** provides an opportunity for the Christian community *to share memories (such as a eulogy) and to offer* initial support to the mourners as they come to terms with the reality of death and to the sorrow that is experienced.

In the **Funeral Liturgy** (with or without Mass), the Christian community affirms and expresses the union of the Church on earth with the Church in heaven in the one great communion of Saints. Though separated from the living, the dead are still at one with the community of believers on earth, and benefit from their intercession and prayers.

At the rite of final commendation and farewell, the community acknowledges the reality of separation and commends the deceased to God.

The **Rite of Committal** is the final act of the community of faith in caring for the body of its deceased member. It is an expression of the communion that exists between the Church on earth and the Church in heaven: the deceased passes with the farewell prayers of the company of believers into the welcoming company of those who no longer need faith but see God face to face. (Order of Christian Funerals #379)

As Roman Catholics, we believe that the body is the temple of the Holy Spirit.

Given this deep respect for the body, the Church insists that the deceased be reverently buried or entombed in sacred, designated places for that purpose; in other words, returned to the earth.

Therefore: cremated remains are to be given the same respect and dignity that we afford the body of a deceased person.

Among other things, this would mean that we would bury in a timely manner, and not divide, scatter, display in homes, put in tattoos or jewelry the cremated remains of loved ones. Keeping the ashes in your home, even in a burial urn, puts the remains at risk of being lost, stolen, or accidentally discarded. As well, it does not help in our process of grieving.

As people of faith, it is important to be informed, so that you can make decisions and discuss your choices with your loved ones. You are encouraged to speak with your parish priest about options and choices, prior to planning with the funeral home. Parishes welcome the opportunity to answer any questions that you might have.



Catholics and Cremation

