

Q&A: What about Cremation?

Since when can Catholics be cremated?

Cremation has been an acceptable alternative to ground burial or entombment for Catholics since 1963. The present code of Canon Law earnestly recommends that the custom of burying the bodies of the dead be observed; however, it does not forbid cremation unless it has been chosen for reasons which are contrary to Christian teaching, such as to deny the doctrine of the resurrection of the dead.

What do we do with the cremated remains of the body?

The church teaches 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 (*Order of Christian Funerals*, #416). While it is recommended that cremation take place after the funeral liturgy, it is now permitted to celebrate the funeral liturgy in the presence of the cremated remains (1997 appendix to the *Order of Christian Funerals*, #426).

Why is it recommended that cremation occur after the funeral liturgy?

The Christian funeral is still celebrated with the funeral liturgy (usually Mass, but not always), and the committal. Liturgy works by means of signs that are perceptible to the senses. An important sign in the funeral liturgy is the body of the deceased Christian. This person – this friend or family member – was created in the image and likeness of

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God. Reborn by water and the Holy Spirit, this person was re-created in the image and likeness of Christ – a living temple of the Holy Spirit. During the vigil, we pray over the body of our deceased loved one and have time to remember, to give thanks, and ask for God's mercy and comfort. For the funeral liturgy, we bring the body of our loved one back

to the house of the church one last time. Just as he or she was welcomed at the door on the day of baptism, washed free of sin in the font and clothed in the shining robe of redemption, we repeat that at the funeral. We welcome the body back to the church's house one final time, we sprinkle the casket with holy water and robe it in the pall – a reminder of the baptismal garment. The body then rests near the paschal candle. Much of this symbolism is lost if the body is not present.

What words do we use to show respect?

In recent years, some have used the term "cremains" to refer to the cremated remains. We encourage people to show due respect by always using the term "cremated remains of the body" or "cremated remains". In this way, even our words show respect.

Where should cremated remains of the body be buried?

Cremated remains of the body should be buried in a grave or entombed in a mausoleum or columbarium.