

NORMS REGARDING CREMATION IN THE ARCHDIOCESE OF PHILADELPHIA

The traditional teaching of the Catholic Church with regard to the proper burial of the sacred remains of the deceased and the resurrection of the body on the last day requires periodic catechesis. This is especially so today with the ever-increasing number of Catholics choosing cremation.

While interment of the body remains the preference of the Church, after the manner of the burial of the Lord Jesus, the use of cremation is allowed according to the following norms. These norms promote the faith and practice of the Church with regard to the burial of a Christian. For the most part, these are already in force according to current liturgical law and the liturgical books. Thus, respect for the remains of the cremated body, as befits the dignity of a baptized person, is ensured. It is the duty of the pastor, with other priests and deacons, to communicate these norms to parishioners, bereavement ministers and funeral directors as part of a periodic catechesis on the reverent and proper burial of the dead.

NORMS FOR FUNERAL RITES WITH CREMATION:

A. If a body is to be cremated, it is always preferable that cremation take place after the Funeral Liturgy.

When cremation takes place after the Funeral Liturgy, the Rite of Committal occurs with the burial/disposition of the cremated remains. The Rite of Committal does not take place in the church after the Rite of Final Commendation at the conclusion of the Funeral Liturgy.

B. If a body is cremated prior to the Funeral Liturgy and the burial/disposition follows, then:

- 1) The cremated remains are to be brought to the Church in a worthy vessel, that is, in a solid and durable container, which may appropriately be marked with the name of the deceased;
- 2) The vessel may be carried in the entrance procession or it may be put in place before the Funeral Liturgy begins (cf. OCF, no. 427);
- 3) The vessel is to be positioned on a suitable table in the same place where the coffin is usually positioned, and not in the sanctuary (cf. OCF, no. 427);
- 4) The covering of the vessel with the pall is to be omitted (cf. OCF, no. 434);
- 5) The Funeral Liturgy is to be celebrated in accord with the Roman Missal, the Order of Christian Funerals and "Appendix 2" of the Order of Christian Funerals (cf. OCF, no. 428);

6) Texts should be chosen in view of the fact that the body of the deceased is not present but has been cremated (cf. OCF, nos. 428-429);

7) In the Funeral Mass with cremated remains, the Rite of Final Commendation is to take place following the Prayer after Communion; in the Funeral Liturgy outside of Mass with cremated remains, the Rite of Final Commendation takes place following the Lord's Prayer;

8) The alternate form of the dismissal is to be used (OCF, no. 437);

9) The Rite of Committal is to be conducted at the cemetery, mausoleum or columbarium as soon as possible following the Funeral Liturgy, using the alternate form (OCF, no. 438);

It is most appropriate that the burial/disposition of the cremated remains immediately follow the Funeral Liturgy.

In any case, the length of time between the Funeral Liturgy and the burial of cremated remains is not to exceed thirty days.

10) The cremated remains are to be buried in a cemetery or entombed in a mausoleum or columbarium (cf. OCF, no. 417);

A mausoleum or columbarium can only be erected where there is already a cemetery (CCL, c. 1242).

It is not permitted to scatter cremated remains.

Likewise, it is not permitted to delay the burial/disposition of the cremated remains in anticipation of the eventual burial of another person. The permanent storage of cremated remains in a private home, funeral home or any other place is prohibited.

The integrity of the cremated remains is always to be respected. The cremated remains of one deceased person may not be mixed with the cremated remains of another person. It is not permitted to divide the cremated remains and retain, inter or entomb them in more than one place.

It is also not permitted to divide the cremated remains in such a way that they are contained in lockets or jewelry. Any other practice which violates the integrity of the cremated remains and impedes reverent and proper burial/disposition is prohibited.

If burial takes place at sea, the cremated remains are to be in a solid and durable container, and not scattered.

11) The place of burial or entombment may be memorialized appropriately.

C. If cremation and burial/disposition takes place prior to the Funeral Liturgy, then:

1) The funeral rites are to be adapted according to the prescriptions of "Appendix 2" of the Order of Christian Funerals (cf. nos. 422-425).

2) The Rite of Committal with the Final Commendation takes place with the burial/disposition of the cremated remains.

3) The Funeral Liturgy may follow but without the Rite of Final Commendation and the Rite of Committal, since these have already taken place.

Cardinal Justin Rigali
Archbishop of Philadelphia
October 1, 2010

References above:

OCF refers to the Order of Christian Funerals

CCL refers to the Code of Canon Law