

# Catholic Cremation

*The phenomenon of cremation is still largely unfamiliar and emotionally uncomfortable for some Catholics.*

*Although cremation has been a practice of the Catholic Church since 1963, restrictions allowed very few Catholics to choose it. In recent years, changes to these conditions made by the Catholic Church have enabled cremation to be considered an acceptable option.*

## Where does the Church stand on cremation?

Because traditional funeral rites are intended to honor the body of the deceased, it is still preferred by the Church that the physical body of the deceased be present during Mass. After the traditional rites of the service have been performed, cremation is carried out.

There are two reasons for this practice. The presence of the body at Mass shows reverence for the body and contributes toward the belief in resurrection of the body and the promise of eternal life. For relatives and friends it is an opportunity to view the body, express condolences and come to terms with the passing of their loved one.

## Changes the Church has made.

Recently, the issue has become whether or not the presence of cremated remains at Mass should be acceptable. Because many Catholics have found cremation to be a necessity at times, this important issue needed to be officially addressed.

In 1997, the National Conference of Catholic Bishops' request for an indult allowing for cremated remains to be present at Mass was answered favorably. The decision, passed down by the Congregation of Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, grants each diocesan bishop the right to decide whether this practice will be allowed in his diocese.

When permission is granted, certain changes in the

wording of funeral rites, as well as ceremonial modifications, must be made. These can be discussed in detail with your Clergy.

## What should I know about the final disposition of cremated remains?

The remains are to be treated with dignity and respect, placing them in a worthy vessel for interment. Once burial rites are held, cremated remains are to receive appropriate disposition in the form of traditional in-ground burial in a private or Catholic cemetery, or entombment in an aboveground columbarium niche, crypt or mausoleum. Interment in this manner allows for permanent memorialization of the deceased, as well as providing a place of visitation and prayer for friends and family members.

The presence of a site marker or plaque plays an important role in aiding friends and family with the grieving and healing processes that occur with the loss of a loved one.

## How does the Church feel about scattering ceremonies?

Cremation itself is not a final means of disposition as it applies to the Catholic faith. The scattering of remains, an irreversible process, or permanently placing a loved one's urn in the home of a relative, is not considered to be in harmony with the reverence that the Church requires. The exception would be a burial at sea, in which a worthy vessel containing a complete set of remains is placed at sea in a formal "rite of committal" ceremony.

## Catholic Choices for Cremation

*The Order of Christian Funerals, Appendix 2: Cremation, gives instructions for three different possibilities:*

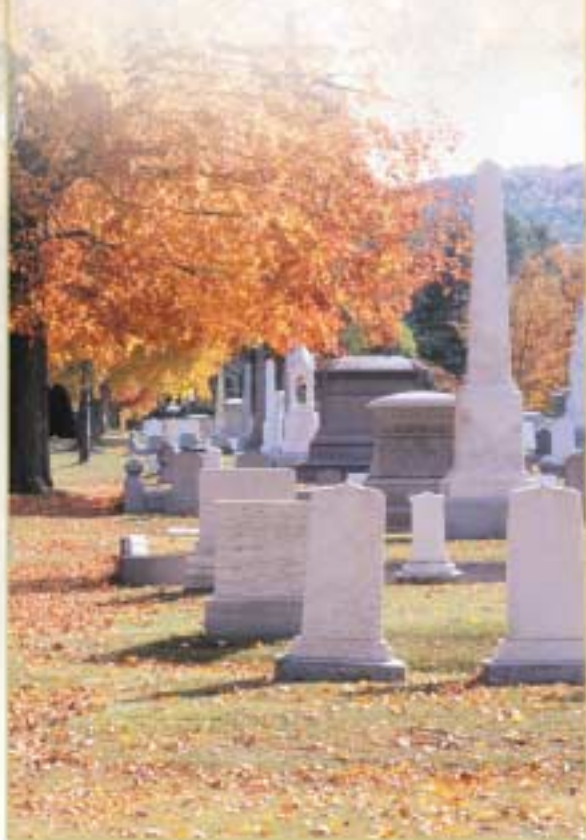
1. When cremation takes place following the Funeral Liturgy
2. When cremation and committal take place following the Funeral Liturgy
3. When the cremated remains are present during the Funeral Liturgy

In the case of the third option, the cremated remains are to be placed in a worthy vessel on a small stand positioned where the casket normally would be. The urn may be carried to its place in the entrance procession or may be placed at the front of the church before the liturgy begins.

## The Catholic Cemetery

There are many reasons for using a church cemetery.

It is consecrated ground shared with other brothers and sisters from the Catholic community. Religious celebrations in the cemetery affirm the Catholic belief that prayer, on behalf of the souls of departed loved ones, is worthwhile.



# *Cremation* FOR *Catholics*

WHERE THE  
CHURCH  
STANDS.