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**Cremation and the Catholic Church**

*Excerpts from the Instruction* Ad resurgendum cum Christo *(15 August 2016)*

*of the*

*Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith*

# Q: When did the Catholic Church begin to allow the bodies of the faithful departed to be cremated?

With the Instruction *Piam et constantem* of 5 July 1963, the then-Holy Office established that “all necessary measures must be taken to preserve the practice of reverently burying the faithful departed,” adding however that cremation is not “opposed *per se* to the Christian religion” and that no longer should the sacraments and funeral rites be denied to those who have asked that they be cremated, under the condition 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”. Later this change in ecclesiastical discipline was incorporated into the *Code of Canon Law* (1983) and the *Code of Canons of the Oriental Churches* (1990).

**Q: Why does the Church prefer the burial of the body rather than cremation?**

Following the most ancient Christian tradition, the Church insistently recommends that the bodies of the deceased be buried in cemeteries or other sacred places.

In memory of the death, burial and resurrection of the Lord, the mystery that illumines the Christian meaning of death, burial is above all the most fitting way to express faith and hope in the resurrection of the body.

The Church who, as Mother, has accompanied the Christian during his earthly pilgrimage, offers to the Father, in Christ, the child of her grace, and she commits to the earth, in hope, the seed of the body that will rise in glory.

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 as an integral part of the human person whose body forms part of their identity. She cannot, therefore, condone attitudes or permit rites that involve erroneous ideas about death, such as considering death as the definitive annihilation of the person, or the moment of fusion with Mother Nature or the universe, or as a stage in the cycle of regeneration, or as the definitive liberation from the “prison” of the body.

Furthermore, 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 and in which “as instruments and vessels the Spirit has carried out so many good works.”

Finally, 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, while at the same time fostering the veneration of martyrs and saints.

Through the practice of burying the dead in cemeteries, in churches or their environs, Christian tradition has upheld the relationship between the living and the dead and has opposed any tendency to minimize, or relegate to the purely private sphere, the event of death and the meaning it has for Christians.

**Q: When is cremation not allowed by the Catholic Church?**

The Church continues to prefer the practice of burying the bodies of the deceased, because this shows a greater esteem towards the deceased. Nevertheless, cremation is not prohibited, “unless it was chosen for reasons contrary to Christian doctrine.”

When the deceased notoriously has requested […] the scattering of their ashes for reasons contrary to the Christian faith, a Christian funeral must be denied to that person according to the norms of the law.

**Q: What about the final disposition of the remains?**

When, for legitimate motives, cremation of the body has been chosen, the ashes of the faithful must be laid to rest in a sacred place, that is, in a cemetery or, in certain cases, in a church or an area that has been set aside for this purpose, and so dedicated by the competent ecclesial authority.

From the earliest times, Christians have desired that the faithful departed become the objects of the Christian community’s prayers and remembrance. Their tombs have become places of prayer, remembrance and reflection. The faithful departed remain part of the Church who believes “in the communion of all the faithful of Christ, those who are pilgrims on earth, the dead who are being purified, and the blessed in heaven, all together forming one Church.”

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. It prevents the faithful departed from being forgotten, or their remains from being shown a lack of respect, which eventuality is possible, most especially once the immediately subsequent generation has too passed away. Also it prevents any unfitting or superstitious practices.

**Q: Can I keep the cremains at home?**

For the reasons given above, the conservation of the ashes of the departed in a domestic residence is ***not permitted***.

**Q: Can the ashes be scattered or kept in pieces of jewelry?**

In order that every appearance of pantheism, naturalism or nihilism be avoided, 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. These courses of action cannot be legitimized by an appeal to the sanitary, social, or economic motives that may have occasioned the choice of cremation.

*For the complete instruction, which was approved by Pope Francis, please go to* [*http://www.vatican.va/roman\_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc\_con\_cfaith\_doc\_20160815\_ad-resurgendum-cum-christo\_en.html*](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20160815_ad-resurgendum-cum-christo_en.html)*.*

*For the Spanish version, please go to* [*http://www.vatican.va/roman\_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc\_con\_cfaith\_doc\_20160815\_ad-resurgendum-cum-christo\_sp.html*](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20160815_ad-resurgendum-cum-christo_sp.html)*.*