

Q&A: What about Cremation?

Since when can Catholics be cremated?

Cremation has been an alternative to ground burial or entombment for Catholics since 1963. Canon Law 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 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 cremated remains of a body should be treated with the same respect given to the corporeal remains. This includes the use of a worthy vessel for 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). It is recommended that cremation take place after the funeral liturgy, however, the funeral liturgy may be celebrated 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 celebrated in three stages: the vigil (commonly called the wake), 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.. This friend or family member was created in the image and likeness of God. Reborn by water in the Holy Spirit, this person was re-created in the image of Christ—a living temple of the Holy Spirit. during the vigil, we pray over the body of our loved one and remember, 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 in the font and clothed in the robe of redemption, we repeat that at the funeral. We welcome the body at the church, 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?

Some use the "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.



Catholic Cemeteries of the Diocese of Joliet
www.dioceseofjoliet.org/cemeteries