

Ask Fr. James

What is the Catholic Church's teaching concerning Cremation?

The Catholic Church allows cremation. In circumstances when cremation is chosen, the Church raises no doctrinal objections to this practice, since cremation of the deceased's body does not affect his or her soul and cremation, does not in and of itself, objectively negates neither the Christian doctrine of the soul's immortality nor that of the resurrection of the body.

However, on October 25, 2016, the Vatican issued a document entitled *Ad resurgendum cum Christo* (To Rise with Christ) "regarding the burial of the deceased and the conservation of the ashes in the case of cremation. The document became necessary as some cremation practices are going contrary to Catholic doctrine on death, burial, and the afterlife.

The document clarified that after cremation:

- 1. The conservation of the ashes of the departed in a domestic residence is not permitted.**
- 2. 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 jewellery or other objects.**
- 3. When the deceased notoriously has requested cremation and 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.**

These clarifications became necessary because it has always been most ancient Christian tradition, that the bodies of the deceased be buried in cemeteries or other sacred places. Burial of bodies or cremations is above all the most fitting way to express faith and hope in the resurrection of the body. 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. 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. 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.

The Church thus recommend that 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, which has been set aside for this purpose, and so dedicated by the competent ecclesial authority. 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.

You may email/send your faith questions to Fr. James and he would answer them in our Sunday Bulletins.