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**Cremation and the Order of Christian Funerals**

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In April 1997, the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments granted an indult for the United States to allow the diocesan bishop to permit the presence of the cremated remains of a body at a Funeral Mass. Later that year, the Congregation confirmed the special texts and ritual directives (Prot. n. 1589/96/L for both indult and texts), which were then published as an appendix to the *Order of Christian Funerals*. Frequently the Secretariat of Divine Worship receives requests for clarification or suggestions for best practices regarding the presence of cremated remains and funerals and their appropriate final disposition or committal.

The practice of cremation has grown and become more commonplace in the United States, and it is often presented as a more affordable alternative to traditional burial. What is often overlooked is the Church’s teaching regarding the respect and honor due to the human body. The *Order of Christian Funerals*’ Appendix on Cremation states: “Although cremation is now permitted by the Church, it does not enjoy the same value as burial of the body. The Church clearly prefers and urges that the body of the deceased be present for the funeral rites, since the presence of the human body better expresses the values which the Church affirms in those rites” (no. 413).

Ideally, if a family chooses cremation, the cremation would take place at some time after the Funeral Mass, so that there can be an opportunity for the Vigil for the Deceased in the presence of the body (during “visitation” or “viewing” at a church or funeral home). This allows for the appropriate reverence for the sacredness of the body at the Funeral Mass: sprinkling with holy water, the placing of the pall, and honoring it with incense. The Rite of Committal then takes place after cremation (see Appendix, nos. 418-421). Funeral homes offer several options in this case. One is the use of “cremation caskets,” which is essentially a rental casket with a cardboard liner that is cremated with the body. Another is a complete casket that is cremated (this casket contains minimal amounts of non-combustible material such as metal handles or latches).

When cremation takes place before the Funeral Mass, and the diocesan bishop permits the presence of cremated remains at the Funeral Mass, the Appendix provides adapted texts for the Sprinkling with Holy Water, the Dismissal for use at the Funeral Mass (or the Funeral Liturgy outside Mass), and the Committal of Cremated Remains. The introduction provides further specific details about how the funeral rites are adapted. In all, the rite notes:

The cremated remains of a body should be treated with the same respect given to the human body from which they come. This includes the use of a worthy vessel to contain the ashes, the manner in which they are carried, and the care and attention to appropriate placement and transport, and the final disposition. The cremated remains should be buried in a grave or entombed in a mausoleum or columbarium. The practice of scattering cremated remains on the sea, from the air, or on the ground, or keeping cremated remains on the home of a relative or friend of the deceased are not the reverent disposition that the Church requires. (no. 417)

For some families, the choice of cremation is based on financial hardship, so this choice often means also that there is no plan for committal or burial of the cremated remains. As a means of providing pastoral support and an acceptable respectful solution to the problem of uninterred cremated remains, one diocese offered on All Souls’ Day in 2011 an opportunity for any family who desired it the interment of cremated remains. The diocese offered a Mass and committal service at one of its Catholic cemeteries and provided, free of charge, a common vault in a mausoleum for the interment of the cremated remains. The names of the deceased interred there were kept on file, though in this case they were not individually inscribed on the vault.

As cremation is chosen more frequently, there will be many who are unaware of the Church’s teaching regarding this practice. It is important for bishops and pastors not only to catechize the faithful, but to collaborate with funeral directors in providing helpful and accurate information to families planning the funeral of loved ones. Offering opportunities to family members for the respectful burial of their loved ones, who were not interred after funeral services and cremation, would give effective witness to the importance of Christian burial and our belief in the resurrection. In all, pastors are encouraged to show pastoral sensitivity, especially to those for whom cremation is the only feasible choice (see Appendix, no. 415).

The following was copied from: <https://catholiccemeteryconference.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/Instruction_Ad_resurgendum_cum_Christo-1.pdf>

TUESDAY, OCTOBER 25, 2016 CDF Instruction Ad resurgendum cum Christo ("To Rise with Christ") Below is the English text of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (CDF) Instruction Ad resurgendum cum Christo ("To Rise With Christ"), released at Roman Page 2 of 7 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”.1 Later this change in ecclesiastical discipline was incorporated into the Code of Canon Law (1983) and the Code of Canons of Oriental Churches (1990). During the intervening years, the practice of cremation has notably increased in many countries, but simultaneously new ideas contrary to the Church’s faith have also become widespread. Having consulted the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, the Pontifical Council for Legislative Texts and numerous Episcopal Conferences and Synods of Bishops of the Oriental Churches, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith has deemed opportune the publication of a new Instruction, with the intention of underlining the doctrinal and pastoral reasons for the preference of the burial of the remains of the faithful and to set out norms pertaining to the conservation of ashes in the case of cremation. 2. The resurrection of Jesus is the culminating truth of the Christian faith, preached as an essential part of the Paschal Mystery from the very beginnings of Christianity: “For I handed on to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures; that he was buried; that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures; that he appeared to Cephas, then to the Twelve” (1 Cor 15:3-5). Through his death and resurrection, Christ freed us from sin and gave us access to a new life, “so that as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life” (Rm 6:4). Furthermore, the risen Christ is the principle and source of our future resurrection: “Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep […] For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive” (1 Cor 15:20-22). It is true that Christ will raise us up on the last day; but it is also true that, in a certain way, we have already risen with Christ. In Baptism, actually, we are immersed in the death and resurrection of Christ and sacramentally assimilated to him: “You were buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the Page 3 of Page 4 of 7 Tobias, the just, was praised for the merits he acquired in the sight of God for having buried the dead,11 and the Church considers the burial of dead one of the corporal works of mercy.12 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. 4. In circumstances when cremation is chosen because of sanitary, economic or social considerations, this choice must never violate the explicitly-stated or the reasonably inferable wishes of the deceased faithful. The Church raises no doctrinal objections to this practice, since cremation of the deceased’s body does not affect his or her soul, nor does it prevent God, in his omnipotence, from raising up the deceased body to new life. Thus cremation, in and of itself, objectively negates neither the Christian doctrine of the soul’s immortality nor that of the resurrection of the body.13 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”.14 In the absence of motives contrary to Christian doctrine, the Church, after the celebration of the funeral rite, accompanies the choice of cremation, providing the relevant liturgical and pastoral directives, and taking particular care to avoid every form of scandal or the appearance of religious indifferentism. 5. 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. From the earliest times, Christians have desired that the Page 5 of 7 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”.15 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. 6. For the reasons given above, the conservation of the ashes of the departed in a domestic residence is not permitted. Only in grave and exceptional cases dependent on cultural conditions of a localized nature, may the Ordinary, in agreement with the Episcopal Conference or the Synod of Bishops of the Oriental Churches, concede permission for the conservation of the ashes of the departed in a domestic residence. Nonetheless, the ashes may not be divided among various family members and due respect must be maintained regarding the circumstances of such a conservation. 7. 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. 8. 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.16 The Sovereign Pontiff Francis, in the Audience granted to the undersigned Cardinal Prefect on 18 March 2016, approved the present Instruction, adopted in the Ordinary Page 6 of 7 Session of this Congregation on 2 March 2016, and ordered its publication. Rome, from the Offices of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, 15 August 2016, the Solemnity of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary. Gerhard Card. Müller Prefect Luis F. Ladaria, SJ Titular Archbishop of Thibica Secretary \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ [1] AAS 56 (1964), 822-823. 2 Roman Missal, Preface I for the Dead. 3 Tertullian, De Resurrectione carnis, 1,1: CCL 2, 921. 4 Cf. CIC, can. 1176, § 3, can. 1205; CCEO, can. 876, § 3; can. 868. 5 Cf. Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1681. 6 Cf. Catechism of the Catholic Church, 2300. 7 Cf. 1 Cor 15:42-44; Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1683. 8 Cf. St. Augustine, De cura pro mortuis gerenda, 3, 5; CSEL 41, 628: 9 Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Pastoral Constitution Gaudium et Spes, 14. 10 St. Augustine, De cura pro mortuis gerenda, 3, 5: CSEL 41, 627. Page 7 of 7 11 Cf. Tb 2:9; 12:12. 12 Cf. Catechism of the Catholic Church, 2300. 13 Cf. Holy Office, Instruction Piam et costantem, 5 July 1963: AAS 56 (1964) 822. 14 CIC, can. 1176 § 3; cf. CCEC, can. 876 § 3. 15 Catechism of the Catholic Church, 962. 16 CIC, can. 1184; CCEO, can.876, § 3.