

## **GUIDELINES FOR CREMATION**

Archdiocese of San Antonio

*“In the face of death, the Church confidently proclaims that God has created each person for eternal life and that Jesus, by his death and resurrection, has broken the chains of sin and death that bound humanity”* (Order of Christian Funerals (OCF), no.1).

### ***INTRODUCTION***

The practice of cremation has increased and become more commonplace, 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.

It is important for bishops and pastors not only to catechize the faithful, regarding the importance of Christian burial and our belief in the resurrection, but to collaborate with funeral directors in providing helpful and accurate information to families planning the funeral of loved ones. Therefore, pastors are encouraged to show pastoral sensitivity, especially to those for whom cremation is the only feasible choice (see Appendix, no. 415, OCF).

### **WHAT ARE THE CANONS REGARDING FUNERALS AND CREMATION?**

Can. 1176. 1: Christ’s faithful who have died are to be given a Church funeral according to the norms of law.

Canon 1176.2: Church funerals are to be celebrated according to the norms of the liturgical books. In these funeral rites the Church prays for the spiritual support of the dead, it honors their bodies, and at the same time it brings to the living the comfort of hope.

Canon 1176.3: The Church earnestly recommends that the pious custom of burial be retained; but it does not forbid cremation, unless this is chosen for reasons which are contrary to Christian teaching.

### **CAN CATHOLICS BE CREMATED?**

Yes. In 1963, the Catholic Church lifted the prohibition forbidding Catholics to choose cremation. The permission was incorporated into the revised *1983 Code of Canon Law* (cf. c. 1176.3) and

reflected in the *Order of Christian Funerals* (OCF). Cremation is permitted, as long as it is not used as a sign of denial of the basic Christian belief in the resurrection of the dead.

Since 1997, the Church's Funeral Rites may be celebrated in the presence of the cremated human remains. While permitted, it is the Church's preference that its funeral rites take place in the presence of the body of the deceased and not in the presence of the cremated remains, "*since the presence of the human body better expresses the values that the Church affirms in its rites*" (cf. *Reflections on the Body, Cremation, and Catholic Funeral Rites, Committee on the Liturgy, USCCB 1997*). Whatever option is chosen, assurance must be given that the cremated remains will be properly buried or entombed. If a family indicates that the remains are to be scattered or disposed of in an inappropriate manner, the cremated remains may not be present in the church for a funeral liturgy.

#### **WHAT MUST BE DONE WITH THE CREMAINS?**

The cremated remains of a body are to be treated with the same respect given to the human body from which they originated. Therefore, the practice of scattering cremated remains on the sea, from the air, or on the ground, or keeping cremated remains in the home of a relative or friend of the deceased, is prohibited. Such practices are not the reverent disposition the Church requires (cf. OCF no.417) and are contrary to Catholic teaching. 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.

Since the cremated remains of a body are to be treated with utmost respect and dignity, the use of a worthy vessel to contain the ashes, the manner in which they are carried, the care and attention to appropriate placement and transport, and the final disposition of the remains are critical.

The cremated remains are to 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 the Church requires. (OCF no. 417). The Catholic Church equally does not permit a portion of the cremated remains to be placed in items such as jewelry or other objects (cf. *Ad resurgendum cum Christo: Regarding the Burial of the Deceased and the Conservation of the Ashes in the Case of Cremation*).

### **CAN CREMAINS EVER BE COMMINGLED?**

Yes, but only within a defined and permanent sacred place set aside for the commingled accumulation and preservation of the ashes of deceased baptized persons, with some type of marker indicating the identity of each person, so as not to lose the memory of their names (cf. Note for the Audience with the Holy Father, *Reply to His Eminence, Cardinal Matteo Maria Zuppi, Archbishop of Bologna, Regarding Two Questions About the Preservation of the Ashes of the Deceased Following Cremation*, 9 December 2023).

### **CAN CREMAINS EVER BE DIVIDED?**

On December 8, 2023, the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith declared ecclesiastical authority, in compliance with current civil norms, may consider and evaluate a request by a family to preserve, in an appropriate manner, a minimal part of the ashes of their relative in a place of significance for the history of the deceased, provided that every type of pantheistic, naturalistic, or nihilistic misunderstanding is ruled out and also provided that the ashes of the deceased are kept in a sacred place (cf. *Note for the Audience with the Holy Father, Reply to His Eminence, Cardinal Matteo Maria Zuppi, Archbishop of Bologna, Regarding Two Questions About the Preservation of the Ashes of the Deceased Following Cremation*, 9 December 2023).

### **CONCLUSION**

The rite of committal follows the church service. The Church strongly recommends that a memorial plaque or stone recording the name of the deceased be placed where the cremated remains are buried or entombed. (OCF Appendix, 417).

As the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith indicates: “*The ashes of the deceased person, moreover, come from the material remains that were part of the person’s historical journey—so much so that the Church shows particular care and devotion concerning the relics of the saints. This attention and remembrance also leads us to have an attitude of sacred respect toward the ashes of the deceased, which we conserve in a sacred place suitable for prayer...*” (cf. *Note for the Audience with the Holy Father, Reply to His Eminence, Cardinal Matteo Maria Zuppi, Archbishop of Bologna, Regarding Two Questions About the Preservation of the Ashes of the Deceased Following Cremation*, 9 December 2023).

