

FAQ on Cremation

Compiled by Christopher Carstens

1. What is the ideal order of funeral liturgies relative to cremation?

“When cremation is chosen, the preferred sequence for the funeral rites is the celebration of the Funeral Mass with the body of the deceased person present, then cremation, and then the interment or entombment of the cremated remains. Such a sequence respects the integrity of the funeral rites, and gives relatives and friends the occasion to pay proper respect to the body of the deceased before it is cremated.” (CBD; also OCF, 418)

2. What is the proper container for holding cremated remains during the funeral liturgy?

“The cremated remains are to be brought to the Church in a worthy vessel, that is in a solid and durable container which is appropriately marked with the name of the deceased.” (CBD; also OCF, 427) If no worthy vessel exists, pastors may consider a type of “ossuary” to house the remains during the funeral liturgy.

3. Is holy water used at a funeral with cremated remains?

Yes. “When the Funeral Liturgy is celebrated in the presence of the cremated remains, the priest, with assisting ministers, goes to the door of the church and using one of the greetings in number 159, or in similar words, greets those present. The priest then sprinkles the cremated remains with holy water, saying: ‘As our brother/sister N. has died with the Lord, so may he/she live with him in glory.’” (OCF, 432-433) Note the change in language from a funeral with a body: “In the waters of baptism, N. died with Christ and rose with him to new life...” (OCF, 160)

4. Is the pall used?

No. “The covering of the cremated remains with the pall is omitted.” (OCF, 434; also CDB) The pall is a “reminder of the baptismal garment of the deceased” (Cf. OCF, 38, 133), and its use is a symbolic clothing of the body of the deceased. When the body no longer exists, there is nothing to clothe.

5. Are the cremated remains carried forward in procession?

Optional: “The vessel may be carried in the entrance procession or it may be put in place before the Funeral Mass or Funeral Liturgy begins. The vessel is to be placed on a table in the same place in which the coffin is usually placed.” (CBD; also OCF, 427)

6. Is incense used?

Optional: the “Funeral Mass is celebrated as laid down in the *Roman Missal* and this ritual” (OCF, 428): that is, unless otherwise noted, the Funeral Liturgy occurs as usual. The instruction at the Final Commendation reads: “The coffin may now be sprinkled with holy water and incensed...” (OCF, 173)

7. How does the funeral liturgy conclude when interment is delayed?

If cremation is to take place after the Funeral Liturgy, or if interment of cremated remains is delayed in order to take them to their final location, an alternate form of dismissal is used. “At the conclusion of the Funeral Liturgy, the Rite of Final Commendation and Farewell takes place,

using the alternate form of dismissal: 'In the sure hope of the resurrection, we take leave of our brother/sister: let us go in peace.'" (OCF, 419, 437; CBD)

8. What are the proper words for the committal of cremated remains?

"In sure and certain hope of the resurrection to eternal life through our Lord Jesus Christ, we commend to Almighty God our brother/sister N., and we commit his/her earthly remains [vs. "his/her body"] to the ground [or the deep, or their resting place]: [earth to earth,] ashes to ashes, dust to dust. The Lord bless him/her and keep him/her and be gracious to him/her, the Lord lift up his countenance upon him/her and give him/her peace." (OCF, 438; also CBD)

9. Can cremated remains be spread, divided, or kept in the home?

No: "It is not permitted to scatter cremated remains over a favorite place, and it is not permitted to keep cremated remains in one's home or place other than a cemetery. (OCF, 417) The integrity of the cremated remains is to be respected. The cremated remains of one deceased person may not be mixed with the cremated remains of another person. It is not permitted to divide the cremated remains and inter or entomb them in more than one place." (CBD; also AR, 6-7)

10. Should funeral rites be denied when there are no plans to inter remains?

"Following the most ancient Christian tradition, the Church insistently recommends that the bodies of the deceased be buried in cemeteries or other sacred places." (AR, 3) "Those charged with the arrangements for the funeral rites of the deceased should see that the cremated remains are interred or entombed at the earliest possible time." (CBD) Thus, pastors are obliged to make their best efforts to see that cremated remains are properly interred, but, in the end, cremated remains are the possession of the family and are theirs to do with as they will. However, "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." (AR, 8)

Sources:

AR: "Instruction *Ad resurgendum cum Christo* regarding the burial of the deceased and the conservation of the ashes in the case of cremation," by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, August 15, 2016. http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20160815_ad-resurgendum-cum-christo_en.html

COCF: "Cremation and the Order of Christian Funerals," from the January 2012 *Newsletter* of the Committee on Divine Worship. <http://www.usccb.org/prayer-and-worship/bereavement-and-funerals/cremation-and-funerals.cfm>

CBD: "On the Christian Burial of the Dead," Pastoral Letter of Bishop Raymond Burke, November 2, 2000.

OCF: *Order of Christian Funerals*, Appendix for Cremation. August 15, 1997.