



Pastor's Column

St. Peter Catholic Church

November 18, 2018, Thirty-Third Sunday in Ordinary Time

Death and Care for the Body: A Catholic Perspective

In this month of November, we are invited in a particular way to pray for our faithful departed. We are encouraged to remember our family and friends who have died in our personal prayer, at Mass, and even to visit cemeteries to pray for All Souls. Understandably, then, our thoughts often turn toward end-of-life concerns, including death itself and the care for the body after death.

To that end, this Sunday's Pastor's Column is borrowed from Fr. Darrin Connall, rector of the Cathedral of Our Lady of Lourdes. Our parish hosted an End-Of-Life Seminar at the end of October, and Fr. Connall shared thoughts with regard to the Catholic perspective of death and the care for the body:

"When it comes to death and the issues surrounding burial and cremation, there are many questions which may be on the minds of Catholics. Many are grateful for having some direction and guidance, particularly when it comes to such sensitive issues. What follows is a very brief summary of the teachings and requirements of the Church at the time of death.

"First of all, the Church clearly prefers that the body be present for the funeral rites. The human body is sacred. During life, the body is a temple of the Holy Spirit. It is washed in Baptism, anointed with sacred oil in Confirmation, and fed the Body and Blood of Christ. The body is an instrument of charity and compassion toward other people. In death, the body is therefore to be shown dignity and reverence. Even if cremation is to take place, the Church encourages the body to be present for the Vigil and the Funeral Mass.

"There are times, however, when this is not possible. In such a situation, the cremated remains may be present for the funeral rites. It is important to note that the remains are to be treated with the same respect we give to the human body. Treating the cremated remains exactly as we would the body means that we place them in a worthy vessel, transport them with dignity, and entomb them in a mausoleum or bury them in a blessed grave. They are not to be scattered in the park, distributed among friends, or poured into a favorite lake or golf course. Our focus is on eternal life, and caring for the remains, as we would the body, points to Jesus Christ and our hope for resurrection.

"There are those who will read this information and have some feelings of guilt for choices made in the past. Many of us have regrets about certain decisions we have made regarding dying, death, and burial issues. Let us just leave that in the past and entrust it to the mercy of God. Looking forward, we strive to live the teachings of our Church when faced with similar situations in the future."

- Fr. Lewis