

The Catholic Church & Cremation

Very few Catholics understand what the Catholic Church teaches about cremation of a deceased Catholic's remains and what the proper way to deal with the ashes is. The Code of Canon Law has only two canons that mention cremation at all. Canon 1176.3 asserts that the Church earnestly recommends that the pious custom of burial of the bodies of deceased faithful should be retained, but adds



that the Church does not forbid cremation unless it is chosen for reasons that are contrary to Christian teaching. This is followed up by Canon 1184.1 and 2 stating that those who choose to be cremated for reasons contrary to the Christian faith are to be deprived of an ecclesiastical funeral.

The **preference of the Catholic Church for burial over cremation** is grounded in theology since we believe and look forward to the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come. We also believe in the dignity of the human body as created in the image and likeness of God [Genesis 1:27] and therefore it is only logical that Catholicism holds that the body of the deceased should be handled with due respect. Consequently, burning it has not traditionally been considered acceptable treatment.

Historically cremation was associated with the funeral practice of pagans, whose religious beliefs included no expectation of eventual resurrection. Thus when a Catholic historically chose to have the body cremated after death, it implied that the Catholic had abandoned hope in the resurrection of the body, and was actively scoffing at it.

The Rite of Christian Burial gives instructions on what to do when a body is cremated. It states: “The **cremated remains of a body should be treated with the same respect given to the human body**. This includes the use of a worthy vessel to contain the ashes, the manner in which they are to be carried, 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 practices of scattering the ashes of the cremated on the sea, from the air, or on the ground, or keeping cremated remains in the home of a family member or relative are not reverent disposition that the Church requires ...” [Paragraph 417]

Scattering the ashes of a loved one may sound like a beautiful thing, but it is not in keeping with the Catholic Church's respect for the bodies of deceased Catholics.

In the United States, **cremations** have taken on a highly personalized and **commercial aspect**. Companies offer to load cremains into shotgun shells so that family members can take them on turkey hunts. Nature lovers ask that their ashes be scattered under a favorite tree or inserted into coral reefs. Cremains can be shot into space, or refashioned as diamonds. **Such practices are sacrilegious** and promote heretical ideas that are dangerous to the faith.

Nicene Creed

**and I look forward to the
resurrection of the dead
and the life of the world to
come.
Amen.**

The Catholic Church teaches and believes that all people will be resurrected - body and soul at the end of days. Burial, the Church says, is the best way to demonstrate respect and reverence for the deceased.

In October 2016 the Vatican published instructions for the cremation of the faithfully departed. It states that a person's ashes must be kept in a sacred place, not in a home or other domestic residence, and should not be scattered or divvied up in ANY way. **The Vatican decreed that the ashes of loved ones have no place in the home, and most certainly NOT IN JEWELRY. It urged that cremated remains be preserved in cemeteries or other approved sacred places.**

The Church cannot condone or disregard attitudes or permit rites that involve erroneous ideas about death, such as considering death as the definitive annihilation of the person ... Beyond normal respect and reverence for the deceased, the Vatican notes that burial in a cemetery **"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."**

In accord with policy of the Archdiocese of New Orleans, a priest or deacon may not preside at a funeral without the guarantee that the cremains will be interred.