

Pre-death Instructions

Who decides if I am cremated?

In most cases you make the decision to be cremated. However, your survivors may decide to have you cremated, generally due to special family circumstances, but rarely against your will.

How do I make my wishes known?

If you desire that your body be cremated you can make those wishes known in your will and in documents designed to help plan and prepare your funeral.

Must I honor my parent's or spouse's wish to cremate them?

Out of respect for loved ones, you will want to do all you can to carry out the wishes of the deceased concerning funeral services provided they are in keeping with Church practice. Yet, you must always keep in mind the therapeutic value to the family of celebrating the full funeral liturgy with the body present. This may significantly outweigh your reasons for cremation before the funeral liturgy.

The Funeral Rituals

What funeral rites are celebrated when a person is cremated?

The Church *strongly* prefers that cremation take place *after* the full funeral liturgy with the body. However, when this is not possible, all the usual rites which are celebrated with a body present may also be celebrated in the presence of cremated remains. In an appendix to the *Order of Christian Funerals*, the United States bishops have included prayers to be used when the cremated remains of a loved one are present in church. (*Order of Christian Funerals, Appendix II #432-438*)

The following rituals may be celebrated:

- ☞ Prayers After Death
- ☞ Gathering in the Presence of the Body
- ☞ Vigil for the Deceased
- ☞ Funeral Mass or Funeral Liturgy Outside Mass
- ☞ Rite of Committal

During the liturgies, the cremated remains are treated with the same dignity and respect as the body.

☞ Prayers After Death

This ritual is used immediately after death. The presence of the minister, the readings, and the prayers can be of great comfort to the family. (*Order of Christian Funerals, #101-108*)

☞ Gathering in the Presence of the Body

This ritual can also be of great comfort to family members and friends. It allows for a time of simple prayer and shared silence. (*Order of Christian Funerals, #109-118*)

☞ Vigil for the Deceased

If cremation has already taken place, friends and family may still gather to pray. While it has been a tradition to pray the rosary in some regions, the Vigil for the Deceased is a Liturgy of the Word service, which includes prayer for the deceased and recognition of his/her Christian life. (*Order of Christian Funerals, #54-97*)

☞ Funeral Mass

Should I schedule a funeral Mass before or after cremation?

The Church *strongly* prefers cremation *after* the Funeral Mass. However, if it is not possible for the body to be present at the Funeral Mass, an indult has been granted by the Holy See which provides for the celebration of the Mass with the cremated remains in church.

Do I need permission to have cremated remains in church (for the funeral liturgy)?

The indult granting the diocesan bishops of the United States authority to permit a funeral liturgy in the presence of cremated remains (in place of the body) requires two things. First, the diocesan bishop must authorize this practice for his diocese. Second, each individual case requires permission. Your pastor will need to seek permission for you.

What length of time is there between death, cremation and the funeral Mass?

The answer to this question depends on various factors, just as in the case of funerals with the body. The place of death, the location of the crematory, scheduling a time for cremation, the schedule at the parish church, and other circumstances impact the timing. Once all

arrangements have been made, you should generally allow at least one day between death and the celebration of the funeral liturgy.

What happens at the Funeral Mass with cremated remains?

A journey which began at baptism comes to conclusion as we enter into eternal life. Significant attention should be given to the primary symbols of the Catholic funeral liturgy, as stated in the *Order of Christian Funerals* and its commentaries. The paschal candle and sprinkling with holy water are primary symbols of baptism and should be used during the funeral Mass. However, the pall is not used. Photos and other mementos may be used at the vigil, but are not appropriate for the Mass. During the Mass, the cremated remains should be treated with the same dignity and respect as the body. They are to be sealed in a *worthy vessel*. They may be carried in procession and/or placed on a table where the coffin normally would be with the Easter candle nearby.

☞ Rite of Committal

The body is always laid to rest with solemnity and dignity. So too, the *Order of Christian Funerals* provides for the interment of cremated remains. (*Order of Christian Funerals, Appendix II #438*)

This pamphlet is a collaborative effort of the Federation of Diocesan Liturgical Commissions and the Worship Offices of Michigan and Ohio in consultation with Rev. Richard Rutherford.

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