

Introduction

Our faith is that life is not for this world only. Through God's gift we hope to share in glory of Christ's resurrection.

'At the death of a Christian, whose life began in the waters of baptism and strengthened at the Eucharistic table, the Church interceded on behalf of the deceased because of its confident belief that death is not the end, nor does it break the bonds forged in life.'

Order of Christian Funerals, 4

Because Christians do not believe that death is the end of the human person, and we do believe in the resurrection of the body, we show care and reverence for the mortal remains for those who have gone before us marked with the sign of faith.

Since in baptism the body was marked with the seal of the Trinity and became the temple of the Holy Spirit, Christians respect and honour the bodies of the dead and the places where they rest.

Order of Christian Funerals, 19

Catholic Practice

Our tradition is to bury the mortal remains of the dead, entrusting them to God until that day when they are raised to the glory of new life. For centuries the practice was for the body of the deceased to be interred directly.

In the past 100 years or so, cremation of the body has become a general practice, largely for environmental and economic reasons. This practice introduces a delay before the ashes, the cremated remains, can be buried.

The Church used not to permit cremation. This was largely because in earlier time enemies of the Church sometimes deliberately burnt the bodies of Catholic Christians and scattered their ashes, sometimes to ridicule the Church's belief in the resurrection, or avoid devotion to the mortal remains (relics) of her martyrs.

More recently the Church has permitted cremation. The former reasons for objecting to it do not generally apply, and there may be good environ-

mental and social reasons for preferring cremation. However cremation is not the same as burial. Cremation merely speeds up what would be the natural processes of disintegration of the mortal remains after death.

Therefore after cremation it remains necessary for the ashes, the mortal remains, to be reverently interred as soon as possible. The burial of the ashes bears witness to our continued care and reverence for the deceased, and our trust and expectation that God in his mercy will raise the dead to new life.

The Church does not permit the scattering of ashes: scattering does not offer proper reverence to the mortal remains of a Christian, nor reflect the theological symbolism of placing of remains in a burial tomb in anticipation of the resurrection.

Burial of Ashes

The Church provides a simple rite for the burial of ashes. The form is:

- Invitation to Prayer
- Scripture Verse
- Prayer of Committal
- The Lord's Prayer
- Blessing

It is usual to ask a priest to lead the service for the burial of the ashes, but the service can in fact be led by anyone.

If you would like someone else to lead the service, your parish priest can provide you with a copy of the rite and the prayers, or you can download the text yourself from the website of the national Liturgy Office:

www.liturgyoffice.org.uk/Resources/OCF/12-Ashes-A5.pdf

There is no set time by which the ashes must be interred, but it is best that the ashes be buried sooner rather than later, if only for the sake of reverence for the mortal remains of the deceased.

Two dates commend themselves – although clearly the burial can take place at any time.

- The first is on the month's mind – a month after the person died.
- The second is a year after their death, on the first anniversary of the death.

Place of burial

Burial in a cemetery or another sacred place helps ensure that proper piety and respect is afforded to the bodies of the faithful departed who through Baptism have become temples of the Holy Spirit and in which “as instruments and vessels the Spirit has carried out so many good works”.[10]

The burial of the mortal remains of the faithful departed in cemeteries or other sacred places encourages family members and the whole Christian community to remember and pray for the dead.

The Church considers the burial of dead one of the corporal works of mercy.

Through the practice of burying the dead in properly approved cemeteries, in churches or their environs, Christian tradition has upheld the relationship between the living and the dead and has opposed any tendency to minimize, or relegate to the purely private sphere, the event of death and the meaning it has for Christians.

Your parish priest, or your funeral director, will be able to offer guidance as to what burial grounds are available locally.



With faith and hope in the resurrection

Cremation and the Church



Diocese of Westminster
Westminster Roman Catholic Diocese Trust:
Registered Charity No. 233699

February 2017

Westminster
LITURGY
Commission