

Prayers for the Dead

We can tell you this from the Lord's own teaching, that any of us who are left alive until the Lord's coming, will not have any advantage over those who have died. At the trumpet of God, the voice of the archangel will call out the command, and the Lord himself will come down from heaven. Those who have died in Christ will be the first to rise, and those who are still alive will be taken up in the clouds, together with them, to meet the Lord in the air (1 Thessalonians 4:16-17).

Death imposes a terrible audit upon the human experience of being alive. Death is the inevitable conclusion to every life. Except for those who are alive on the Last Day, everyone else born into this world will one day surely die. Death entered into our universal human reality not according to God's intention but rather as a sad consequence of sinful human choice.

As the inspired words of the *Book of Wisdom* remind us: *God did not make death, nor does he rejoice in the destruction of the living. For he fashioned all things that they might have being (Wisdom 1: 13-14).* So in our experience of life wounded by original sin, death has become integral to our fragile human condition. Yet the deepest desires of our human hearts are oriented to infinity. In lives bounded by birth and death, we have an innate human hunger for life without end.

The Paschal Mystery: Christ has died, Christ is Risen

As Saint Ambrose once instructed the Church of Milan: *The Lord only allowed death to enter into this world so that sin might come to an end. But in Christ he gave us the resurrection of the dead so that our nature might not end. Death was to bring guilt to an end and the resurrection was to empower our nature to continue forever (Ambrose, Let Us Show Christ Crucified in our Lives).* The death and resurrection of Jesus has overturned the hopelessness and apparent victory of death, because our human existence will, in Christ, find its ultimate fulfillment through the general resurrection of the dead.

Centuries earlier, Saint Paul taught the Church of Corinth in a

similar way: *What died was perishable, weak, mortal. What rose was imperishable, glorious, immortal* (1 Corinthians 15:42). As he also wrote to the Church of Rome: *Sin came into the world through one man, and his sin brought death with it, as a result death spread through the whole human race because everyone has sinned. Just as sin reigned wherever there was death, so grace will reign to bring eternal life thanks to the righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ our Lord* (Romans 5:12-13, 21). Our salvation in Christ has ultimately defeated death. Our journey towards death now reveals God's promise of life without end. So believers should neither fear nor deny death. For those who live a new life in Christ, death has become a Passover from mortality into immortality.

Facing this inescapable passage is a very important aspect of the life-long process of personal maturity. Those who consciously face death can more easily appreciate the precious gift of life. An awareness of death should encourage a much deeper intensity in the experience of living. Looking honestly at death offers us greater liberty in our choices and enhances our appreciation of the meaning of human existence. Understanding our mortality invites us to discriminate between right and wrong, between good and bad, between what is important and what is unimportant. Accepting the limitations of time invites us to more deeply embrace generosity, mercy, and most especially love, because these virtues have eternal value.

Every Ash Wednesday, our heads are crossed with ashes, and we hear words that are profoundly true: *Remember you are dust, and to dust you shall return*. In this deliberate recollection, believers are invited to renew our savor for life and use our allotted time on earth more wisely. Redeemed and born again, Christians should really be the happiest people alive. Because we know that our endless longing will at last be fulfilled in the infinity of God, we can more readily delight in what is given, without placing eternal expectations on passing realities. As the Preface for the Mass of Christian Burial boldly proclaims: *The sadness of death gives way to the bright promise of immortality. Lord for your faithful people, life is changed, not ended. When the body of our earthly dwelling lies in death, we gain an everlasting dwelling place in heaven.*

Contemporary Challenges of a Death Denying Culture

How far from this confident Catholic perspective is the increasingly hopeless culture of our contemporary world! Those who live in denial of death tend to live unconsciously and often without moral purpose. In the face of wars and rumors of wars, natural disasters, accidents, pandemics, and the inescapable fact of human mortality, what is relentlessly promoted is not wisdom, but unremitting distraction and a desperate search for ever increasing sensation. Youth is foolishly idealized, and old age is just as foolishly denigrated. Any limitation on human choice, even in the face of God and nature, is angrily rejected. Attempting to live as if there were no eternity becomes increasingly mindless and most often ends in despair.

Despite the sobering universality of death, the actual experience of dying is now mostly concealed from our view. Folks usually die away from family and friends, hidden in hospital rooms or nursing homes. For those left behind, grief is supposed to be managed in just a matter of days. Nearly all of the older rites of grieving, mourning, and shared remembrance are often limited to the day of the funeral. Even among believers, this unreflective culture has made unfortunate inroads. As a partial antidote, I would propose that all of us in the Church of Peoria not only strive to more deliberately remember the reality of death, but also to reclaim the comforting richness of our Catholic tradition and spirituality.

To remember the dead in prayer is both a work of mercy and an unbroken practice of the Holy Catholic Church. Extending back to apostolic times, the inscriptions left by Christian believers at cemeteries, catacombs, and the shrines of the martyrs clearly evidence their faith that the dead can be assisted by the intercession of the saints and the prayers of the living. The great Communion of Saints is made up of the holy ones in paradise, the holy souls in purgatory, and the faithful here on earth. There are no limits on the compassion of those in glory for those in the state of purgation or for all who continue to strive in this life. Through the mercy of Christ, the constant prayers of the entire

Church assist the souls of the faithful departed who are now safely on their way to absolute perfection.

Our Participation in the Paschal Mystery: The Holy Sacrifice of the Mass

The reality of death will, most often, first confront us in the passing of those we love. Both our hope in the resurrection and our love for one another should oblige us to pray constantly for *all those who have died and gone before us*. The Church faithfully honors the memory of the dead and offers ceaseless prayers for their eternal rest, above all in the Eucharistic Sacrifice. In the Mass, the infinite grace and endless mercy of the Lord's one perfect oblation on the cross is renewed and truly made present. In the Mass, it is Christ himself who intercedes for all those who have died.

In the Mass, our High Priest and Mediator prays that the dead may at last attain the fullness of salvation in the beatific vision of God. In the Mass, the truly immense and unfathomable supplication of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Saint Joseph, and all the angels and saints are united in Christ with the prayers of the entire believing community on behalf of the dead. We simply have no better way to express our love for those who have died than to arrange for Masses to be offered on their behalf. As we loved them in life, we must never forget them in death.

The Church also commends almsgiving, indulgences, and works of penance on behalf of the dead. As Saint John Chrysostom once preached: *Let us help and commemorate the dead. If Job's sons were purified by their father's sacrifice, why should we doubt that our offerings for the dead bring them some consolation? Let us not hesitate to help those who have died and to offer our prayers for them* (Chrysostom, Homilies on 1st Corinthians). *The Catechism of the Catholic Church* also teaches: *Since the faithful departed now being purified are also members of the same communion of saints, one way we can help them is to obtain indulgences for them, so that the temporal punishment due for their sins may be*

remitted (CCC 1490).

In very real and significant ways our prayers and Masses for the dead also keep us in personal communion with them. In prayer and worship, the experience of time dissolves, and this passing world and the eternal *world to come* are drawn closer together. In the great mystery of the Body of Christ, we are spiritually united with those holy souls who loved us in this life and continue to love us in that eternal life after death. In Christ, they see us more clearly than we are now able to see them.

Masses for the Dead

In Funeral Masses, in anniversary Masses, in visits to the cemetery, and in our persistent prayers for our deceased relatives and friends we give expression to our grieving and grow through sadness into more attentive lives of faith. In the solemn intercessory rites of our religion, we also have the opportunity to retell our family story to our children and our children's children. In the face of a culture increasingly without memory, we can share with the young the unwavering faith of their Catholic ancestors and pass on the Church's beautiful and sustaining traditions of familial prayer and piety.

Except in the most extraordinary circumstances, every Catholic who dies should have a Mass for Christian Burial offered on their behalf. The Mass is never something superficial, much less a bother, even when offered for those who die in great old age or after an extended illness. There is no priest or parish in this Diocese who would not fail to offer the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass for any Catholic who has died, no matter how destitute or little known.

The Mass is always an effective means of grace for both the living and the dead, and must never be neglected. It is a scandal and even a grave sin when ungrateful children do not arrange Catholic funerals for parents who in life were always faithful to Sunday or even daily Mass. Almighty God will certainly judge them severely for their impious neglect.

Preparing to Meet the Lord

I would also propose that it would be wise for most people to make their own advance funeral arrangements with their parish priest and their funeral home. Planning for a Funeral Mass, for their own burial in consecrated ground, and for Masses to be offered for the repose of their souls is a prudent step for any Catholic believer and would save families from difficult decisions at a time of grief and stress.

Everyone should also have a legal will, and a certain portion of their wealth, no matter how great or small, should be left for the poor, for good works, and for the ministries of the Church. We are but temporary stewards of our time and our treasure. The wealthy in particular should make careful provision that what they leave behind will accomplish good.

November, the month of the Holy Souls, should be an annual occasion for pastors to encourage believers to make prudent arrangements for the end of their lives and for the beginning of their eternity.

There are specific Church ordinances and sensibilities that should also be regularly taught in our parishes, schools, and apostolates. Internment in consecrated ground is preferred in our Catholic tradition because it testifies to our belief in the sanctity of the body and our faith in the promise of resurrection.

Cremation is allowed but preferably only after a Funeral Mass is celebrated with the body present. Memorial Masses with ashes brought into church are also allowed, but the ashes of the dead should ideally then be interred in a cemetery. Keeping ashes at home on the mantle, in a back closet, or in the trunk of a car indicates worldly indifference rather than Christian reverence. (See Appendix 2)

Praying as the Church believes

Funeral homilies are a tremendous opportunity for a priest or deacon to comfort, teach, but most especially, to evangelize.

Thankfulness for the life of the deceased would be an aspect of nearly every funeral homily, but preaching should very seldom take on the character of canonization. Only the Blessed Mother was entirely preserved from sin, while according to the scriptures even the just have failed daily. It is for God alone to accurately judge a human life.

The assembled congregation at a Funeral Mass should be encouraged to feel a sense of awe, not only before God's great mercy, but also before his perfect justice. The wise and holy among the faithful have always asked for the intercession of the Church to assist them after death, rather than for words of flattery at a funeral which can no longer do them any good.

We must also recognize that the predominate religious culture of our country is Protestant. Their funeral services consist mostly of hymns, some scripture, a sermon, and often several eulogies, without any intercessory prayers for the dead or the celebration of a sacrament. Catholic worship, however, should always be intentionally Catholic.

Multiple eulogies at a Catholic funeral can distort the nature of our sacred liturgy and even diminish the profound centrality of the Eucharistic Sacrifice. Extended words offered by family members or friends are best given at the wake service or funeral meal. If *words of remembrance* are offered at Mass after the Post Communion Prayer, they should normally be given by only one person, be brief, and certainly be entirely orthodox in content. It would be best if a priest were able to review the text beforehand. (Appendix 1 of this letter provides an outline of the Catholic Rites for the Dead.)

Remember Death

I would also ask that throughout the year priests and deacons preach more frequently about the brevity of life, about the necessity of preparation for death, and about our obligation to offer prayers for all those who have gone before us. Pastors and chaplains, Catholic school teachers and parish catechists should regularly encourage the celebration of Masses on behalf of the dead. They should also

strengthen or even reintroduce those Catholic customs of piety and devotion that would so greatly assist those in the midst of bereavement.

All Souls Day and the entire month of November should be a special time when all our parishes, hospitals, cemeteries, and schools offer Masses for the dead, remember in prayer our deceased relatives and friends, and in charity extend our prayers for the repose of all the poor souls in purgatory.

The Communion of Saints

We will always grieve for the loss of those we love, but not like those who have no faith. The happy death of Saint Joseph in the arms of Jesus and Mary should fill us with confidence, but we should also never be ashamed of our own tears. Jesus himself cried out in anguish at the death of his friend Lazarus. The great sorrow of Mary embracing the body of her Son beneath the cross teaches us that even the most faithful will know the awful pain of separation.

But like the holy women at the tomb, like the holy apostles gathered in the upper room, like the disciples on the road to Emmaus, the Risen Christ announces to us the greatest possible Good News: *Peace be with you. Look at my hands and my feet, and see that it is myself. Touch me, and you will know that a ghost doesn't have flesh and bones, as you can see I have* (Luke 24:39-40). Christ is risen! Christ is truly risen!

In summary, the hope filled, the exulting, and the sanctifying words of our Catholic liturgy should be faithfully offered by family, friends, parish, and diocese on the occasion of the death of each and every believer and in the subsequent years of memory and recollection.

God our eternal Father, by your endless power Christ conquered death and returned to you in glory. May all those who have gone before us in faith come at last to share in the fullness of his victory and enjoy forever the vision of your glory, where Christ lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, forever and ever. Amen.

V. *Eternal rest grant unto them O Lord.*

R. *And let perpetual light shine upon them.*

V. *May they rest in peace.*

R. *Amen.*

V. *May their souls and all the souls of the faithful departed, through the mercy of God rest in peace.*

R. *Amen.*

+ Daniel R. Jenky C.S.C.

✠Most Reverend Daniel R. Jenky, C.S.C.
BISHOP OF PEORIA

Appendix I: An Outline of the Major Funeral Rites of the Catholic Church

I. *The Wake: A Vigil for the Deceased (Rosary and/or Liturgy of the Word)*

Family and friends usually gather the evening before the Funeral Mass to remember and pray. The vigil for the deceased is the first of the three major rites celebrated by the Christian community. Some form of communal prayer accompanies this time of remembrance, usually a Rosary or Liturgy of the Word.

When: The vigil is celebrated between the time of death and the funeral liturgy, often on the day before or evening before the funeral Mass.

Where: The vigil may take place in the home of the deceased, at the funeral home, or in the church.

Minister: A priest, deacon, or under the direction of your pastor, a layperson may preside at this liturgy.

Content: During the time of vigil, it is customary to pray the Rosary or to meditate on the Word of God in the form of the Liturgy of the Word. A brief homily/reflection by the presider may also be included. The Wake is the preferred time for family and friends to offer stories, reflections, and eulogies on the life of the deceased. In the Diocese of Peoria, the Rosary may always replace the liturgical scripture service at the pastoral discretion of the priest or at the request of the family.

II. *Funeral Mass*

The funeral Mass is the central liturgical celebration for the deceased. The Christian community reaffirms in sign and symbol, word and gesture that through baptism we share in Christ's death and resurrection, and look forward to the day when we will be raised up and united in the kingdom of light and peace. We pray for the soul of the deceased and commend our loved one to the Mercy of God.

When: The funeral Mass is normally celebrated the evening before, or on the day of burial/committal.

Where: The funeral Mass takes place in the parish church.

Minister: A priest is the celebrant of a funeral Mass and he may be assisted by other priests and deacons.

Content: The funeral Mass begins at the entrance of the church. The priest and the gathered assembly receive the body of the deceased. The coffin is sprinkled with holy water and the pall is placed upon it by family or friends of the deceased to recall the deceased's baptism. The body is carried in procession toward the altar and placed near the paschal candle. When the coffin is in place, other Christian symbols, such as the Book of Gospels or cross may be placed on the coffin.

Mass continues as the community celebrates the Liturgy of the Word. The homily is based on the readings and focuses on the paschal mystery and God's love. The assembly prays for the deceased and the bereaved in the intercessions. The Liturgy of the Eucharist is celebrated as usual. In word and sacrament, we celebrate Christ's death and resurrection and reaffirm our share in this mystery.

The final commendation immediately follows the prayer after Communion. At this time the deceased is entrusted to God's tender care. While an extended time of sharing and remembrance is most appropriate for the vigil, if desired, one family member or friend may offer a brief prepared eulogy with the permission of the pastor. The song of farewell is the climax of the rite of final commendation. This song, affirms our hope and trust in the paschal mystery. The body may be incensed during or following the song of farewell. The prayer of commendation concludes the rite.

The procession is formed and the body is carried to the place of burial/committal.

Music for Funeral Mass. Music selections for funerals are made in conjunction with the ministers of music in the parish and follow the directives of the Roman Catholic Church regarding music in the liturgy.

While any number of songs may help us remember our loved one's favorite hobby, sports team or nationality, these secular songs are inappropriate during the funeral Mass. These special songs are best used during other times of remembrance and celebration, such as a luncheon following Mass.

III. *Burial/Committal*

The funeral rites conclude with the rite of committal.

When: The burial/committal takes place as soon as possible after the funeral Mass.

Where: The rite of committal takes place beside the open grave or place of interment. If this is not possible, it may take place at a cemetery chapel.

Minister: A priest, deacon, or lay person may preside at this service.

Content: Though brief, the rite of committal assists the bereaved at this most difficult time. This rite includes a short Scriptural verse, the prayer of committal, intercessions, Lord's Prayer and a blessing. The lowering of the body into the grave or placement in the tomb or crematorium may take place following the prayer of committal or at the conclusion of the rite. A song affirming hope in the resurrection may conclude this rite. Those who wish may offer some gesture of leave-taking at this time.

Related Optional Rites

Though secondary, these rites are helpful in accompanying the mourners at times of transition and through the various stages of facing the reality of death.

Prayers after Death

This rite is a model of prayer, which may be used in whole, in part, or adapted for particular circumstances. It consists of a brief reading, the Lord's Prayer and some concluding prayers. This rite may be used when the pastoral minister (i.e. priest, deacon, or layperson) first meets with the family following the death.

Gathering in the Presence of the Body

As the family gathers in the presence of the body for the first time, the pastoral minister is present to offer prayer and support. This rite consists of a short passage from Scripture, a psalm, sprinkling with holy water, and the Lord's Prayer.

Transfer of the Body to the Church or to the Place of Committal

This rite supports the family and friends as they prepare to take the body to the church or place of committal. It consists of a brief Scripture verse, litany, the Lord's Prayer and a concluding prayer lead by the pastoral minister.

Cremation

The Catholic Church permits cremation unless it is evident that cremation was chosen for anti-Christian motives. When cremation is chosen one of the following options is used. (A special "Q&A" section about cremation can be found in appendix 2 of this pamphlet.)

Cremation after the funeral liturgy

Even when cremation is chosen, the Church recommends that the body of the deceased be present for the funeral rites. The presence of the

human body better expresses the values that the Church affirms in the funeral rites. When cremation follows the liturgy, the funeral liturgy and other rites are celebrated as described above.

Funeral liturgy in the presence of the cremated remains

The Holy See authorized the bishops of the United States to allow the celebration of a funeral liturgy in the presence of the cremated remains of the body. The cremated remains of the body are to be treated with the same respect given to the human body.

Prior to the funeral Mass or as a part of the entrance procession of the Mass, a worthy vessel, containing the cremated remains, is carried with reverence into the church. The cremated remains are placed on a suitable stand or table in the place normally occupied by the coffin. The funeral Mass begins with the sprinkling of holy water; however, a pall is not placed over the cremated remains. The funeral Mass is celebrated as described above. Following the prayer after Communion, the rite of final commendation takes place as usual.

Cremation and committal prior to the funeral liturgy

When the body is cremated and committed soon after death, the rites of final commendation and committal are used at the appropriate times, even though occurring prior to the funeral liturgy. The vigil and other rites are also adapted, as necessary. Following the committal, the family and friends of the deceased join the community in celebrating the funeral liturgy. After Communion, the blessing is given and the people are dismissed.

The cremated remains of the body, due the same respect as the remains of the body, must be buried in a cemetery, entombed in a columbarium or buried at sea.

Cemetery

Burial takes place in a special area set aside for the resting place of the deceased. Aside from the legal restrictions for burial, a Catholic may choose the site of burial.

Catholic Cemetery

A Catholic cemetery is a sacred place that is set aside by the local church's bishop. A Catholic cemetery is the resting place for those who are baptized, who worshipped and lived their Christian faith, and in death complete their baptismal commitment at rest with their fellow companions in faith. However, it is not a requirement to be Catholic to be buried in a Catholic cemetery.

Many parishes have parish cemeteries for parishioners and their families. There are also several cemeteries throughout the Diocese of Peoria that are part of our Diocesan Cemetery Association. For more information about the ministry and service of our diocesan cemeteries, please contact your local Catholic parish or you may call the diocesan Pastoral Center – 309-671-1550

Non-Denominational Cemetery

Within the norms for Catholic burial a Catholic may choose to be buried in a cemetery other than a Catholic one. The rite of committal includes a ritual for blessing the place of burial if it has not been previously blessed.

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Appendix 2: Frequently Asked Questions about the Church and Cremation

As a Catholic may I be cremated?

Yes. The Church's definite preference is for burial of the body. However, since 1963 cremation has been permitted, although the cremated remains were not allowed to be present during the funeral mass. In 1997 the Vatican gave the bishops of the United States permission to allow the celebration of the funeral mass with the cremated remains present, provided the local bishop permits it.

Do I need to ask permission to be cremated?

No, but it is a good idea to discuss your reasons with your pastor. For a funeral mass with the cremated remains present, the pastor will want to make sure that the remains will be reverently buried in a grave or mausoleum within a suitable amount of time before he gives his permission.

When should cremation take place?

The Church strongly prefers that cremation take place after the full funeral liturgy with the body. The presence of the body most clearly brings to mind the life and death of the person and better expresses the values that the Church affirms in its rites.

This is the body once washed in Baptism, anointed with the oil of salvation, and fed with the Bread of Life. This is the body whose hands clothed the poor

and embraced the sorrowing. ... Thus, the Church's reverence and care for the body grows out of a reverence and concern for the person whom the Church now commends to the care of God. ... However, when circumstances prevent the presence of the body at the funeral liturgy...it is appropriate that the cremated remains of the body be present for the full course of the funeral rites, including the Vigil for the Deceased, the Funeral Liturgy, and the Rite of Committal. The funeral liturgy should always be celebrated in a church. (Reflections on the Body, Cremation, and Catholic Funeral Rites, Bishops' Committee on the Liturgy)

Is it necessary to embalm?

When cremation follows the funeral liturgy, embalming is usually necessary. When cremation is to follow soon after death, embalming is not necessary. Each state has its own regulations in this matter, but generally the rule is that a deceased human body that is not buried or cremated within 24 or 48 hours is to be embalmed or refrigerated. However, simple embalming and the use of a cremation casket need not involve excessive costs.

Is it necessary to purchase a casket?

No, it is not necessary to purchase a casket for cremation. The only thing required is a simple container in which the body can be transported and placed in the cremation chamber. If you choose to have the body present for Mass, with cremation to follow, rental is an option. Many funeral directors offer regular caskets for rent, as well as the special cremation or shell caskets which you may purchase.

Careful Handling and Proper Interment of Cremated Remains

What is the proper container for cremated remains?

Appropriate, worthy containers (not necessarily expensive) such as a classic urn are proper for the cremated remains. At the present time the U.S. Bishops have determined only what is *not* a proper container. Although jewelry, dishes, statuary and space capsules are examples of designer containers now being offered, they are *unacceptable* in Catholic funeral practices.

It is repugnant to Catholic belief about the sanctity of the human

body to have cremated remains made into jewelry, dishes and the like.

How are cremated remains transported?

Transportation of cremated remains is a matter of personal choice. Individuals personally carrying a deceased person's ashes will often have the added responsibility of packing and transporting the urn. Using the principle of respect for the body, you may wrap the container of cremated remains with the possibility of sending it as accompanying baggage or take it along as carry-on luggage. Ask the airline office or the state's Department of Public Health for specific information about your region of travel before preparing the cremated remains for transport by air. Where no legal regulations exist regarding transport of cremated remains, most cremationists ship cremated remains in a standard shipping container by U.S. Mail or other common carriers.

Must cremated remains be buried/entombed?

Yes. Respectful final disposition of cremated remains involves interment or entombment. Burial options include a *family grave* in a cemetery marked with a traditional memorial stone or an *urn garden*, a special section in a cemetery with small, pre-dug graves for urns.

What is a columbarium?

A common practice is the entombment of the cremated remains in a *columbarium*. It is an arrangement of niches, either in a mausoleum, a room or wall into which an urn or other worthy vessel is placed for permanent memorial.

May I scatter the cremated remains?

No.

The practice of scattering cremated remains on the sea, from the air, or on the ground, or keeping cremated remains in the home of a relative or friend of the deceased are not the reverent disposition that the Church requires. (*Order of Christian Funerals, Appendix II #417*)

Burial at sea of cremated remains differs from scattering. An appropriate and worthy container, heavy enough to be sent to its final resting place, may be dropped into the sea. (*See Order of Christian Funerals, #406.4*) Please consult your local government for environmental regulations.

May anything be added to cremated remains such as the cremated remains of other persons, pets, other objects?

The principle of respect for the cremated remains of a deceased Christian embraces the deeper belief in the individuality of each baptized person before God. Throughout history, the mingling of remains has never been an accepted practice, except in extraordinary circumstances.

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.

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.

In the Diocese of Peoria, the Bishop has given pastors the authority to grant permission for cremated remains to be present at the funeral liturgy. However, your pastor will want to make sure that your reasons for cremation and the plans for final disposition of the remains are in accord with Church teaching and practice.

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.

The above information comes from a pamphlet prepared by the Federation of Diocesan Liturgical Commissions and the Worship Offices of Michigan and Ohio in consultation with Rev. Richard Rutherford. It has been modified to be in accord with the practices of the Diocese of Peoria. Excerpts from *Reflections on the Body, Cremation, and Catholic Funeral Rites* ©1997 United States Catholic Conference, Inc. (USCC); *Order of Christian Funerals, Appendix II* ©1997 USCC. Used with permission. All rights reserved. © 1999 Federation of Diocesan Liturgical Commissions. Revised 2000. www.fdlc.org; publications@fdlc.org; voice 202-635-6990; fax 202-529-2452. Used by the Diocese of Peoria with permission.