

# Guidelines for the Funeral Liturgy with Cremated Remains present

*Promulgated by  
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The Church clearly prefers and urges that the body of the deceased be present for the funeral rites. The presence of the body forcefully reminds us that we are temples of the Holy Spirit and destined for future glory at the resurrection of the dead. In addition, the body, which lies in death, recalls the personal story of faith, the past relationships and the continued spiritual presence of the deceased person. Thus, the presence of the body is important for the grieving process of family and friends.

It is recommended cremation take place after the funeral liturgy, which allows the full celebration of the funeral rites as found in the *Order of Christian Funerals*. See also *Order of Christian Funerals, Appendix 2: Cremation, #418 (OCF, Appendix 2: Cremation)*.

The Church's teaching with regard to the human body as well as the Church's preference for corporeal burial should be a regular part of catechesis on all levels. Pastors should make particular efforts to preserve this important teaching. The tenor of this catechesis should clearly emphasize that the Church's funeral rites celebrated in the presence of the body of the deceased remains the norm.

With sensitivity and care, pastors should assist families in making the decision whether or not to cremate the body before the funeral liturgy. Making the decision to cremate primarily on the basis of convenience is inappropriate in light of the Church's teaching.

In extraordinary circumstances, the Diocesan Bishop grants permission for the pastor or his delegate to celebrate the funeral liturgy in the presence of the cremated remains following the guidelines as outlined here.

All funeral Masses are to be celebrated in the church, not the funeral home. (*OCF, Appendix 2: Cremation: p. 15*)

Appropriate music always must be a significant part of the funeral liturgy. Psalms, hymns and antiphons that express our sustained and insistent prayer commending the deceased person to God's merciful care should be chosen so his or her place in the communion of the just may be assured. (*OCF, #'s 30-33*)

## **Respect for Cremated Remains of a Body**

“The remains of cremated bodies receive the same respect given to the corporeal remains of a human body. This includes a worthy, sealed vessel to contain the ashes, the manner in which they are carried, the care and attention to appropriate placement and transport, and their final disposition.” (*OCF Appendix 2: Cremation p. 16*)

Cremated remains are entombed in a mausoleum or columbarium; they may also be buried in a common grave in a cemetery. The practices 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 the Church requires (*OCF Appendix 2: Cremation, p.16*). Pastors should ensure that such practices are not used.

Some are beginning the practice of constructing columbaria for the remains of the deceased at parish churches. Columbaria SHOULD NOT be incorporated into parish church buildings, as prescribed in Canon 1242 of the 1983 code. The possibility of closing parish churches and demolishing or selling church buildings containing columbaria raises particular concerns. (*OCF Appendix 2: p. 16*)

### **Part I: When Cremation Takes Place Following the Funeral Liturgy**

At the conclusion of the funeral liturgy, the rite of final commendation and farewell take place, using the alternate form of the dismissal. (*OCF #430*) The body is then taken to the place of cremation where the rite of committal may be celebrated. (*OCF #'s 204, 212*) Then the cremation of the body takes place.

When the cremated remains are given to the family, they reverently are taken to a place of burial or entombment and the rite of committal may be repeated using the alternate form provided. (*OCF #431*)

### **Part II: When Cremation and Committal Take Place Before the Funeral Liturgy**

The “Prayers after Death” and the “Vigil for the Deceased” may be adapted as necessary and appropriate and celebrated before the funeral liturgy.

When the interment of the cremated remains takes place before the celebration of the funeral Mass, the rite of committal and final commendation is celebrated at the time of interment (before the Mass). The alternate form (*OCF, p. 10*) is used for the words of committal.

Following the committal, the family and friends of the deceased join the Christian community for the funeral Mass. Prayers should be chosen that do not make reference to burying the body of the deceased since this already has been done. A number of options may be found in the *Roman Missal* under the heading “Masses For The Dead.” The OCF also offers suggested opening prayers and scripture readings. (*OCF, #164, #190, Part III, Texts of Sacred Scripture, Part V, Additional Texts*)

The rite of final commendation is omitted since this already has taken place.

Following the prayer after communion, the blessing is given and the people are dismissed in the usual way. It is appropriate to conclude the funeral liturgy with a hymn, antiphon or psalm which expresses our belief that for those who have died, “life is changed, not ended. When the body of our earthly dwelling lies in death, we gain an everlasting dwelling place in heaven.” (*Preface, Christian Death 1*)

When the funeral liturgy is celebrated outside of Mass, the rite of final commendation is omitted since this already has taken place at interment. Following the Lord’s Prayer, a blessing is given and the people are dismissed in the usual way.

### **Part III: Funeral Mass in the Presence of the Cremated Remains**

Sometimes it is not possible for the body to be present for the funeral Mass. When extraordinary circumstances make the cremation of the body prior to the funeral liturgy the only feasible choice, pastoral sensitivity must be exercised by all who minister to the family of the deceased.

In extraordinary circumstances the Diocesan Bishop grants permission to pastors or their delegate to celebrate the funeral liturgy in the presence of the cremated remains in the church. “Due decorum” as mentioned in (*OCF Appendix 2: Cremation, #417*) suggests that “Option 1” below is more appropriate.

#### **Option 1 – Cremated remains placed before the procession**

1. A small table or stand is prepared in the sanctuary for the cremated remains. They should not be placed on the altar of sacrifice, or any side altars. This should be done in such a way that it does not appear the cremated remains are enthroned.
2. The cremated remains may be placed on the table before the funeral liturgy begins.
3. If the table or stand is prepared at the place normally occupied by the coffin, care should be taken that it will not be disturbed during the communion procession.
4. The paschal candle should be placed near the table or stand on which the cremated remains rest during the funeral liturgy.
5. The presiding priest greets the family and friends at the church entrance, and leads them in procession to their place in the church. An appropriate hymn, psalm or antiphon should be sung at this time.
6. On reaching the altar, the priest, with the assisting ministers, makes the customary reverence, kisses the altar, and if incense is used, incenses the altar.
7. When the presiding priest reaches his chair and the song is finished he may use one of the greetings in *OCF #159* or similar words. He may then sprinkle the cremated remains with holy water according to the following prayer:  
“As our brother/sister has died with the Lord, so may he/she live with him in glory.”
8. If the priest chooses not to sprinkle the cremated remains, he goes immediately to the opening prayer. (*#11 Option 1, below*)
9. The covering of the cremated remains with a pall is omitted.

10. Other Christian symbols (crucifix, Book of the Gospels) should not be placed on top of the cremated remains.
11. If the priest has sprinkled the cremated remains (#7 above), he then says “Let us pray...” and continues with the opening prayer of the Mass as found in the *Roman Missal* under the heading “Masses for the Dead.” The *OCF* also offers suggested opening prayers and scripture readings. (*OCF*, #164, #190 Part III, *Texts of Sacred Scripture, Part V, Additional Texts*) Prayers which do not make reference to the honoring or burying of the body of the deceased should be chosen instead of those which have these themes.
12. The funeral Mass continues in the usual manner. (*Cf.* #'s 10, 11, 12, 13 in *Option II* below)

## Option II – Cremated remains carried in procession

1. A small table or stand is prepared in the sanctuary for the cremated remains. They should not be placed on the altar of sacrifice or any side altars. This should be done in such a way that it does not appear the cremated remains are enthroned.
2. If the table or stand is prepared at the place normally occupied by the coffin, care should be taken that it will not be disturbed during the communion procession.
3. The priest goes to the family at the church entrance, together with the assisting ministers. Using one of the greetings in *OCF* #159, or similar words, he greets those present.
4. The priest and assisting ministers precede the bearer of the cremated remains and the mourners into the church, accompanied by an appropriate hymn, psalm or antiphon.
5. A family member reverently may carry the cremated remains and place them on the small table in the sanctuary.
6. The covering of the cremated remains with a pall is omitted. Other Christian symbols (crucifix, Book of the Gospels) should not be placed on top of the cremated remains.
7. The priest, with the assisting ministers, then makes the customary reverence, kisses the altar, and if incense is used, incenses the altar. Then he goes to the chair. (see *OCF* #164)
8. The priest may sprinkle the cremated remains with holy water, saying:  
“As our brother/sister has died with the Lord, so may he/she live with him in glory.”
9. The priest then says “Let us pray....” and continues with the opening prayer of the Mass as found in the *Roman Missal* under the heading “Masses for the Dead.” The *OCF* also offers suggested opening prayers and scripture readings. (*OCF*, #164, #190 Part III, *Texts of Sacred Scripture, Part V, Additional Texts*) Prayers which do not make reference to the honoring or burying of the body of the deceased should be chosen instead of those which have these themes.
10. The funeral Mass continues in the usual manner.
11. Following the prayer after communion, the rite of final commendation is celebrated. The priest may incense the cremated remains during the song of farewell.
12. The alternate form of the dismissal is used. (see *OCF, Appendix 2: Cremation, p. 10*)
13. The rite of committal is celebrated at the cemetery or columbarium as soon as possible following the funeral liturgy. The alternate form for the words of committal is used. (*OCF, Appendix 2: Cremation, p. 10*)
14. When the rite of committal with final commendation is celebrated, the alternate form of the words of committal is used.