

What is the Catholic View on Cremation?

Cremation of the dead body is something new to Catholic Christian tradition. The early Church retained the Jewish practice of bodily burial. The basis for this rule was simply that God has created each person in His image and likeness, and therefore the body is good and should be returned to the earth at death (Gen 3:19). Moreover, our Lord Himself was buried in the tomb and then rose in glory on Easter. A strong belief in the body as the temple of the Holy Spirit, as well as the belief in the resurrection of the body, support the Church's continued reverence for the human body.

Early Christians viewed cremation as a pagan practice and a denial of the doctrine of the Resurrection. They buried their dead both out of respect for the body and in anticipation of the resurrection at the Last Judgment. The old 1917 *Code of Canon Law* (No. 1203) even prohibited cremation and required the bodies of the faithful to be buried.

The new *Code of Canon Law* (1983) stipulates, "The Church earnestly recommends that the pious custom of burying the bodies of the dead be observed; it does not, however, forbid cremation unless it has been chosen for reasons which are contrary to Christian teaching" (No. 1176.3). In 1997 the Holy See granted permission to U.S. bishops to allow funeral Masses in the presence of cremated remains. A rite of committal for cremated remains is provided as an alternative in the current funeral rite.

The cremated remains should be buried in a grave or entombed in a mausoleum or columbarium. Church does not approve 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.