



STATEMENT AND POLICIES ON CREMATION PROVINCE OF MIAMI

From the first century, Christians have followed the Semitic custom of burying the dead, both in contrast to the Roman practice of cremation and in opposition to the contempt shown Christians by their persecutors in their occasional cremating of the bodies of martyrs and the scattering of the ashes. Down through the centuries the practice of rites of burial prevailed. Today, in the United States, the traditional *Order of Christian Funerals* includes the vigil for the deceased, a funeral mass in the parish church and the committal at the grave or tomb.

Saint Paul wrote: *You must know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is within - the Spirit you have received from God. You are not your own. You have been purchased, and at a price. So glorify God in your body.* (1 Corinthians 6: 19-20)

During the lifetime of a Christian on earth, the body, which was created by God and raised in baptism to a special dignity, serves as a temple of the Spirit. In our modern times, when life is valued by some as cheap, abortions are legal, and euthanasia is considered charity, there is no wonder that those without faith, oftentimes, quickly and carelessly dispose of the body.

As Christians, we are reminded that while Jesus walked this earth, He had a human body. With His hands He cured the sick and the cripples. With His feet He walked to visit friends and meet strangers to whom He preached the news of salvation. On Mt. Tabor, His human body was transfigured. On the Cross, His body endured intense suffering for our redemption. His body risen from the empty tomb is our hope of resurrection.

In masses for the dead, the Church celebrates the Eucharistic Sacrifice of Christ's Passover for the departed and offers prayers and petitions for them. In communion with all Christ's members, these prayers bring both spiritual strength and a consoling hope. The viewing of the body of a beloved deceased does not constitute a display of something repugnant but rather offers an advantageous opportunity beneficial to the mental well-being of the survivors by facing the reality of the moment upon their minds and emotions. Modern grief-counselling therapists indicate that this experience is helpful in an acceptance of death by the bereaved left behind.

It is the expressed tradition of the Catholic Church that the practice of Christian burial be maintained. The *Revised Code of Canon Law* adopted in November 1983 states in Canon 1176, paragraph 3: *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 that are contrary to Christian teaching.*

Recognizing particular circumstances and varying cultures and customs in different parts of the world, the Church issued in 1963 *Instructions on Cremation* which allow some latitude, under certain conditions, to those Catholics who request that their bodies be cremated.



Norms and Policies on Cremation

The following guidelines are adopted for the Province of Miami:

- A. Permission for cremation may be requested of a priest for hygienic, economic or other reasons of a public or private nature. Some examples would be: transfer of remains to a distant place, possible avoidance of considerable expense, national tradition or custom, a severe psychological or pathological fear of burial in the ground or tomb, etc.
- B. The selection of cremation generally is the specific choice of the individual before death. The family might request cremation for what may be determine good and/or pastoral reasons that can be accommodated.
- C. When doubt arises for the priest or deacon as to the proper motivations of the deceased or of the family for cremation, favor should be given to the request unless contrary indications are clear.
- D. When cremation is seen as an acceptable alternative to the normal manner of Catholic burial, the body of the deceased should be brought into the church for the funeral mass. It does not seem suitable to celebrate with cremated remains the rite intended to honor the body of the dead.
- E. The rites ordinarily performed in the cemetery chapel or at the grave or tomb may be performed in the crematory building. Care must be taken to avoid scandal or suggestion of religious indifference.
- F. The cremated remains must always be treated with respect. They should be interred or entombed, preferably in blessed ground. A deacon or priest may accompany the remains to the cemetery and perform the prescribed rite.
- G. Proper motives for seeking cremation are usually presumed. The priest whose responsibility it is to perform the funeral is the person who must determine whether the reasons are within those recognized as adequate. In case of persistent doubt in this matter, none should be denied the rites of Christian burial without consulting the chancellor of the diocese

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