

Should Catholics Cremate?

The last line of our Creed we pray each Sunday says, “we believe in the resurrection of the body and life everlasting”. How should this central Catholic Christian belief in the resurrection of the body affect our funeral liturgies and planning? The short answer is a great deal. Until 1997 the bodily remains were required for a funeral Mass to be celebrated. Now there is a permission to have a Mass with “cremains” present. It should be made clear though that although cremation is permitted, cremains do not enjoy the same value as the burial of the body. The Church clearly prefers and urges that the body of the deceased be present for funeral rites, since the presence of the body better expresses the values which the Church affirms in those rites.

We must remember that the body of the deceased Catholic Christian is also the body once washed in Baptism, anointed with the oil of salvation and fed with the Bread of Life. The Church teaches that the body is the temple of the Holy Spirit and is destined for future glory at the resurrection of the dead. In short, the body’s role is not finished! I often hear many say of the deceased “she is an angel now” or similar expressions made surely from a deep love and faith. Yet, we must be diligent in remembering that angels have no body! A human person is body and soul, hence the promise of bodily resurrection for us in Christ! A reflection of the body of Jesus Christ resurrected by the Father on Easter morning and the important Assumption of Mary body and soul that we celebrated on the feast of August 15th. Many “new age” religions today often say that the body the material of our bodies is incorporated or “recycled” after death into the earth, etc. Catholics believe that the body is sacred and the Lord will raise it up on the last day- how different! Our funeral liturgy is ripe with prayers and references to this. Let’s reflect on what Easter means to us as Catholics and to our temples as well and of course of those we love. Cremation is allowed for sure but not the preferred way to honor our body in light of what we believe.

To conclude:

- the preference is for Christian burial of the body.
- If* cremation takes place it should take place after the funeral liturgy and not before.
- Cremains must be buried/interred and *never* scattered
- the body for Catholics is not simply discarded after death but treated with reverence and respect and in light of the future resurrection of the body.

In Christ Jesus,
Fr. Taillon