

CREMATION AND EULOGIES AT FUNERALS AND FUNERAL VENUE  
FAQ

1. How does the Church regard the human body, especially with regard to funerals?

Before we get to questions about cremation we have to understand the Church's teaching regarding the treatment of the human body at the time of death. The Church regards the human body as sacred. "The body of the deceased brings forcefully to mind the Church's conviction that the human body is in Christ a temple of the Holy Spirit and is destined for future glory at the resurrection of the dead" (*Order of Christian Funerals, Cremation Appendix [hereafter, OCFCA] #412*).

2. What is the preference of the Church regarding the presence of the human body at the funeral liturgy?

"The Church prefers and urges that the body of the deceased be present for the funeral rites, since the presence of the human body better expresses the values which the Church affirms in those rites" (*OCFCA #413*). Therefore, it is preferable that, if a body is to be cremated, the body be present at the Funeral Liturgy and the cremation and Committal take place after the Liturgy.

3. May a funeral liturgy be celebrated in the presence of cremated remains?

The answer to this question is a **qualified** "yes." "The celebration of the Funeral Liturgy, including Mass, in the presence of the cremated remains of the body of a deceased person is permitted in the dioceses of the United States of America under the following conditions:" (*OCFCA #426*).

a. That the cremation not be inspired by motives contrary to Christian teaching...."

b. That the diocesan bishop has not judged such a practice pastorally inappropriate.

In addition, it should be noted that "although cremation is now permitted by the Church, it does not enjoy the same value as burial of the body" (*OCFCA #413*).

Put succinctly, cremation, while permitted, is not the preferred option of the Church, because of the Church's reverence for the human body and the necessity of the respectful disposition of it at death. The decision to cremate the body of a deceased person should be considered an exceptional choice.

4. Should it be necessary to have cremated remains at the Funeral Liturgy, how should they be presented?

“The cremated remains of a body should be treated with the same respect given to the human body from which they come. This includes the use of a worthy vessel to contain the ashes, the manner in which they are carried, the care and attention to appropriate placement and transport, and the final disposition” (OCFCA #417).

5. May cremated remains be kept in one’s home, divided among family members, or scattered on the ground or in bodies of water?

“The cremated remains should be buried in a grave or entombed in a mausoleum or columbarium. 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” (OCFCA #417). In addition, in the State of Louisiana, it is illegal to scatter cremated remains in state waters.

The reservation of the ashes of the departed in a sacred place ensures that they are not excluded from the prayers and remembrance of their family or the Christian community. It prevents the faithful departed from being forgotten, or their remains from being shown a lack of respect, which eventuality is possible, most especially once the immediately subsequent generation has too passed away. Also it prevents any unfitting or superstitious practices (*Instruction Ad resurgendum cum Christo: regarding the burial of the deceased and the conservation of the ashes in the case of cremation*, Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, 15 August 2016).

6. What about eulogies being delivered at funerals?

OCF # 27 states “there is never to be a eulogy.” A bishop, priest or deacon delivers a funeral *homily* following the Gospel reading. The homily is to focus on God’s compassionate love and the paschal mystery, and should also aid the assembly in understanding the application of God’s love and the benefits of Jesus’ victorious resurrection to the situation of the deceased and the gathered assembly.

With regard to family members or friends speaking at the Funeral Liturgy, in place of a eulogy they may offer “words of remembrance” regarding the deceased. In the Diocese of Houma-Thibodaux these “words of remembrance” may be offered **before** the Funeral Liturgy begins or perhaps at a wake service for the deceased.

7. May the Funeral Liturgy be celebrated at a funeral home for the sake of convenience?

According to Canon 1177 (*Code of Canon Law*), the most appropriate place for a Funeral

Liturgy is the parish Church where deceased persons celebrated their faith or at least where they geographically resided. For good reason other Catholic Churches may be used for funerals. According to the policy of the Diocese of Houma-Thibodaux, funerals may take place at funeral homes in exceptional situations, and in such a case the Rite of Funerals outside of Mass is to be used. Funeral Masses are not permitted in funeral homes in the Diocese of Houma-Thibodaux.