



## Catholic Burial Rites

Our Catholic Christian faith is founded upon the discovery of the empty tomb of the crucified Jesus. The Gospels report to us the care that was taken by people close to Jesus to see that his body was given a proper burial; they also report how the jarring news of an open and empty tomb was the first step toward the beginnings of faith in Jesus' conquest of death — his resurrection into which his faithful people are incorporated.

Across the 28 counties of our diocese, there are approximately 100 Catholic cemeteries. They function in accord with the provisions of the Code of Canon Law. "Where possible, the Church is to have its own cemeteries, or at least an area in public cemeteries which is duly blessed and reserved for the deceased faithful. If, however, this is not possible, then individual graves are to be blessed in due form on each occasion" (canon 1240). Canon 1241 provides for parish cemeteries. We remember the corporal work of mercy "to bury the dead." Fulfillment of this work of mercy is fittingly done by burying Catholics in Catholic cemeteries. We urge all Catholics to plan for burial in Catholic cemeteries wherever possible. Our diocesan Office for Cemeteries is happy to provide contact information for all Catholic cemeteries in the diocese.

According to Canon 1183, catechumens, children whom the parents intended to baptize but who died before baptism, and baptized members of non-Catholic churches or ecclesial communities may be given ecclesiastical funeral rites provided their own minister is not available. Permission may be given by the diocesan bishop for burial of non-Catholic Christians in Catholic cemeteries in certain circumstances. [see Ecumenical Directory #137] This most frequently involves situations of marriage in which the non-Catholic spouse chooses to be buried next to the Catholic spouse.

### **Organ Donation:**

As we consider the task of laying the faithful departed to rest, we keep in mind the needs of the arts and sciences of healing, and we encourage individual Catholics to consider offering themselves as organ donors, or donating their mortal remains to medical science. After a body has fulfilled its service to medical study, it is usually cremated, and the considerations presented below regarding cremation must be noted.

### **Cremation:**

Canon 1176 §3 states: "The Church earnestly recommends that the pious custom of burial be retained; but it does not forbid cremation, unless this is chosen for reasons which are contrary to Christian teaching." Cremation was expressly permitted by the Holy See in 1963, although burial of the body is still preferred. Prior prohibitions of the practice of cremation were motivated to counter the efforts of some persons, at various times in history, to present cremation as an act of denial of the truth of the resurrection of the body; hence the warning about one's motivation for cremation.



## SS. Peter and Paul Catholic Cemetery

It is recommended that the cremation of a body take place after the Funeral Liturgy. At the conclusion of the Funeral Liturgy, the Rite of Final Commendation and Farewell takes place, using the alternate form of dismissal: "In the sure hope of the resurrection, we take leave of our brother/sister; let us go in peace." Then the cremation of the body takes place. 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 used before the Funeral Liturgy.

By virtue of an indult of the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, the celebration of the Funeral Liturgy, including Mass, in the presence of cremated remains is permitted in dioceses of the United States, provided: 1) that the motive for cremation not be contrary to Christian teaching (canon 1176 §3); and 2) that each diocesan bishop will judge regarding the pastoral appropriateness of such a practice.

As diocesan bishop, I have judged this practice to be appropriate in accord with the specified norms while noting that burial of the body is still preferred as the ideal way of expressing Christian faith in the resurrection of the body. (See the Appendix to the Order of Christian Funerals for further details.)

Cremated remains are to be treated with the same dignity as the bodies of the dead. They are to be "at rest" in the same way as bodies. Therefore, indiscriminate scattering of remains over land or sea is not permitted. Burial of cremated remains at sea is acceptable, provided that the remains are in a weighted vessel. Cremated remains are not to be launched into earth's orbit. Cremated remains are not to be incorporated into jewelry or other objects which have a purpose other than the dignified repose of the faithful departed.

Regarding the practice of keeping a spouse's cremated remains at home until the death of the other spouse: Granted that economic concerns may be operative, we must keep in mind that, as the "Reflections" on the Appendix to the Order of Christian Funerals stress, keeping remains at home is "not the reverent disposition that the Church requires." Furthermore, columbaria are not to be incorporated into parish churches.

It is my hope that this survey of issues related to the burial of Catholic Christians will be useful to the faithful of our diocese as all of us make plans for the disposition of our mortal remains, and as we await our incorporation into the fullness of the resurrection of Jesus.

With best wishes, I remain  
Sincerely yours in Christ,

Most Reverend Thomas John Paprocki  
Bishop of Springfield in Illinois

