

Considering Cremation

Although cremation is now permitted by the Church, it does not enjoy the same value as burial of the body. The Church clearly 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.

Order of Christian Funerals, 413

The Church does not prohibit cremation unless it was chosen for reasons contrary to Christian doctrine.

Code of Canon Law, 1176 § 3

The Church continues to prefer the practice of burying bodies of the deceased. If cremation is chosen for a reason, that does not deny the faith, cremated remains of a body should be treated with same respect given to the corporal remains of a human body. As such, cremation should ordinarily take place following the funeral Mass.

A funeral Mass with the cremated remains requires that every effort be made to treat the ashes with the same respect given to the human body. "This includes the use of 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" (*Order of Christian Funerals, 417*).

Cremated remains must be laid to rest in a sacred place, preferably a Catholic cemetery or entombed in a mausoleum or columbarium. Scattering the cremated remains, keeping them at home, or dividing them among family members does not reflect the reverent disposition of the remains that the Church requires.

Planning for the Rites

Your parish can assist you in selecting appropriate readings, music and prayers for the funeral liturgy. Family members are encouraged to take part in the planning process. Depending on parish custom, family members may serve in the liturgies as:

- Reader
- Usher
- Placing a Crucifix and Bible on the casket
- Bringing up the Gifts

Jesus Christ, who has accompanied you and your loved one in life, will walk with you in your path of sorrow. The Church, too, desires to accompany you in this time of loss. Bereavement support groups provide an excellent opportunity for mourners to share their feelings and experiences in a caring, non-judgmental, confidential setting.

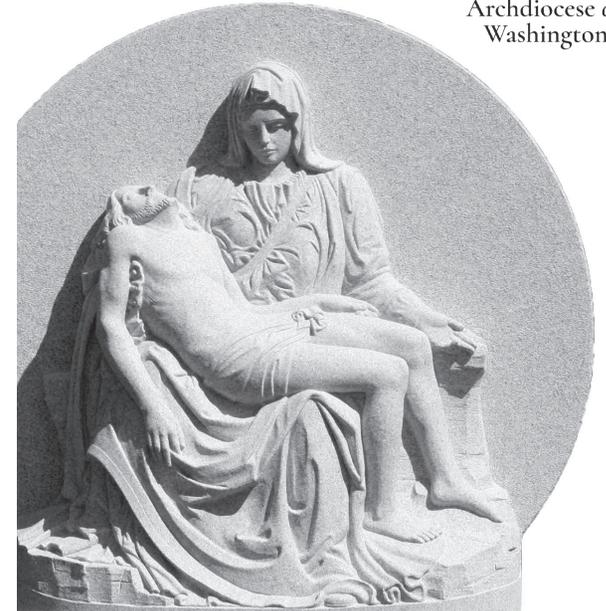
Check with your parish about bereavement support groups or visit the Catholic Cemeteries of the Archdiocese of Washington Bereavement page for resources: ccaw.org/bereavement.

At the death of a Christian, whose life of faith was begun in the waters of baptism and strengthened at the Eucharistic table, the Church intercedes on behalf of the deceased because of its confident belief that death is not the end or does it break the bonds forged in life. The Church also ministers to the sorrowing and consoles them in the funeral rites with the comforting word of God and the sacrament of the Eucharist.

Order of Christian Funerals, 4.



Archdiocese of
Washington



Mass of Christian Burial

Our parish is ready to accompany you and your deceased loved one through the celebration of the passage from this life to eternal life.

Catholic funeral traditions provide three distinct opportunities to come together in faith to express our love for the deceased and to express our Christian hope in the Resurrection.

In celebrating the funeral rites, we offer worship, praise, and thanksgiving to God for the gift of a life that has now been returned to God, the author of life and the hope of the just.

Vigil Service (the Wake)

At the vigil, the Christian community keeps watch with the family in prayer to the God of mercy and finds strength in Christ's presence"

Order of Christian Funerals, 56

This is the principal ceremony prior to the funeral liturgy. While traditional, the Vigil Service is an optional opportunity to come together, in a more informal setting to pray, share and provide support to the family while offering condolences at the time of grief and loss.

Typically, the vigil service includes a short prayer service, including the reading of Sacred Scripture. The family may choose to include a song, prayers of intercession, or silent prayer. Catholics have a long tradition of praying the Rosary at the wake.

The wake is the most appropriate setting for friends/family to offer remarks or remembrances about the deceased. This should be done only with permission from the family.

The vigil may be held in the home of the deceased, the funeral home or funeral chapel prior to the funeral liturgy. Some parishes allow the vigil to be held in the Church just prior to the funeral liturgy.

May the love of God
and the peace of the
Lord Jesus Christ
bless and console us
and gently wipe every
tear from our eyes.

(from the Committal Rite)

Funeral Liturgy (Mass of Christian Burial)

As Christians, we celebrate the funeral liturgy as a hope-filled prayer for the soul of the deceased and for the consolation of those who suffer the loss of their loved one.

Pope Francis, Misericordia et Misera 15

While a funeral liturgy often brings peace and consolation to those who mourn, the primary purpose of the liturgy is to assist the dead with our prayers. Therefore, it is strongly recommended that the funeral liturgy be celebrated in a Mass. This allows family and friends of the deceased, who are Catholic, to participate in the Eucharistic sacrifice offered for the deceased person by receiving Holy Communion.

Through the readings and prayers of the funeral liturgy: we pray for the soul of our deceased loved one; we thank God for His abundant mercy, and renew our faith and hope in the Resurrection.

WORDS OF REMEMBRANCE

The most appropriate times for family members and friends to offer remarks about the deceased is at the wake, before the funeral Mass begins or after the funeral Mass, such as at a reception.

If a eulogy is offered during the funeral Mass, the remarks should be read from a brief, written script. All remarks must be reverent and express the Christian hope of Christ's victory over death.

The Interment (Committal Service)

Lord Jesus Christ, by your own three days in the tomb, you hallowed the graves of all who believe in you and so made the grave a sign of hope that promises resurrection even as it claims our mortal bodies.

Order of Christian Funerals, 405

The committal, celebrated at the grave or tomb is the final act of the community of faith in caring for the body of its deceased member. As we offer our prayers of farewell, we express our hope in the glory of the Resurrection and our belief in the communion that exists between the Church on Earth and in Heaven.

The committal service includes a short Scripture reading and prayer. Before taking our final leave, a prayer is offered for the those gathered, and often a gesture, such as placing flowers or soil on the casket, is made.

As blessed and sacred spaces, Catholic cemeteries reflect our tradition of worship and express the link of community between the faithful living and dead. Therefore, it is preferred that Catholics be buried in Catholic cemeteries or columbaria for cremated remains. However, Catholics may be buried in non-Catholic cemeteries, especially to avoid breaking family ties with deceased family members buried outside a Catholic cemetery.

Arrangements for the burial should be made by the family directly with the cemetery. The Catholic Cemeteries of the Archdiocese of Washington are ready to assist you: www.ccaw.org.