

Appendix 25: Diocese of Bismarck Policy on Funeral Rites and Cremation

Presence of the Body at the Funeral Liturgy

“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 . . . Sometimes, however, it is not possible for the body to be present for the funeral Mass. When extraordinary circumstances make the cremation of a body the only feasible choice, pastoral sensitivity must be exercised by priests, deacons and others who minister to the family of the deceased” (OCF, #413, 415)

And so the following are acceptable options for a Catholic burial, in descending order of preference by the Church:

1. Remains kept in bodily form at all funeral rites, including burial.
2. Remains kept in bodily form at the main funeral rites (e.g. vigil, funeral Mass, or simple liturgy of the Word), followed by cremation and then burial of all the cremated remains as would a body.
3. Remains are cremated immediately after death, with the cremated remains present at all funeral rites, followed by burial of all the cremated remains as would a body.

I point out that faculties to permit the last scenario above are already granted to clerics of the diocese, while reaffirming the following conditions in any case involving cremation: a) that cremation not be inspired by motives contrary to Christian teaching, and b) the cremated remains will be handled with respect and integrally (all of them) buried or entombed in a timely manner as would a body.

Respect for the Cremated Remains of the Body

“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. The cremated remains should be buried in a grave or entombed in a mausoleum or columbarium.” (OCF #417)

If the body is cremated, all the cremated remains must be interred in a timely fashion – a grave, a mausoleum, or columbarium. In part or as a whole they may never be scattered nor should they be incorporated into jewelry or art. A priest or deacon should accompany the remains to the cemetery and perform the prescribed liturgical rites. If the grave or niche has not been blessed, the priest or deacon is to do so at this time.

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