

## A Message from Fr. Roberto

### Cremation

In the last few years, I have noticed that cremation (burning of a dead human body) is becoming a more common practice for Catholics. While the Catholic Church has allowed cremation since 1963, people still have many questions about the practice. I am also aware of some families who have kept their loved ones cremated remains (also called “cremains”) in their homes or divided them in jewelry instead of placing them in a cemetery. The Church does not allow these practices. Below is some information about cremation in general and what to do with cremated remains in particular. It is reprinted from an article in the “*Catholic Voice*,” our Diocesan newspaper, from October 18, 2010 (for the entire article, see: <http://www.catholicvoiceoakland.org/2010/10-18/commentary.htm>).

### What does the Catholic Church teach about cremation? Isn't the Church opposed to the practice?

The 1983 revision of the Code of Canon Law states that the Church “earnestly recommends” traditional burial but accepts cremation as long as the choice is not made “for reasons which are contrary to Christian teaching” (canon 1176). The Catechism of the Catholic Church echoes this teaching (no. 2301). The cremation option is a fairly recent development.

When the Church was still in its infancy, cremation was associated with pagan religions that denied the resurrection of the body. The early Christians, out of belief in the resurrection and the understanding that the body is a “temple of the Holy Spirit” (1 Cor 6:19), were careful to treat the human body with great reverence even after death. They would anoint and bury or entomb the body just as the Jews did.

That tradition stood firm until 1963, when the Vatican’s doctrinal office issued an instruction allowing cremation under conditions that would be enshrined two decades later in the canon cited above.



### Suppose I have a loved one cremated. What am I to do with the cremated remains?

It is important to note that the cremated remains of the deceased must always be treated with the same reverence and respect as the body. Cremated remains must be properly placed in a dignified container that is either buried in a cemetery or interred in a mausoleum, columbarium, crypt or family burial plot. For members of the Catholic faithful, it is most appropriate to choose a Catholic cemetery or mausoleum for burial or interment. Many cemeteries have designated chapels or walls with small niches for placing urns with cremains where photos and mementos can be placed. It is not in keeping with the dignity of the person to store or display the cremated remains in the home, nor to divide the remains for burial or interment in multiple locations. Burial at sea is acceptable if an urn containing the

complete set of remains is submerged in the water. For U.S. Catholics, scattering of ashes — whether at sea, on land or in the air — is not permitted.

**How do I arrange for the cremation of a loved one who has died?**

In the Oakland Diocese, you can contact the office of Catholic Funeral and Cemetery Services (CFCS) at 1-800-498-4989 or [www.cfclivingourmission.org](http://www.cfclivingourmission.org). CFCS operates its own mortuary and crematorium and can help Catholics plan for all the details involved with the dignified care of the deceased, which may include embalming, visitation, online memorial, vigil, funeral service or Mass, committal rite, and burial or interment at any of the Catholic cemeteries or columbaria in the diocese. CFCS offers a church-owned oak casket that can be rented so that the body may be present at the funeral prior to cremation, which saves the family from having to purchase a casket. For families who have cremated remains in their possession and do not know what to do with them, CFCS will inter them free of charge in a Catholic cemetery through its Holy Angels Remembrance Program. This service is available to everyone regardless of religious faith.