

## Introduction

Our faith is that life is not for this world only. Through God's gift we hope to share in glory of Christ's resurrection.

*'At the death of a Christian, whose life began in the waters of baptism and strengthened at the Eucharistic table, the Church interceded on behalf of the deceased because of its confident belief that death is not the end, nor does it break the bonds forged in life.'*

*Order of Christian Funerals, 4*

Because Christians do not believe that death is the end of the human person, and we do believe in the resurrection of the body, we show care and reverence for the mortal remains for those who have gone before us marked with the sign of faith.

*Since in baptism the body was marked with the seal of the Trinity and became the temple of the Holy Spirit, Christians respect and honour the bodies of the dead and the places where they rest.*

*Order of Christian Funerals, 19*

## Catholic Practice

Our tradition is to bury the mortal remains of the dead, entrusting them to God until that day when they are raised to the glory of new life. For centuries the practice was for the body of the deceased to be interred directly. More recently cremation of the body has become a general practice, largely for environmental and economic reasons.

The Church used not to permit cremation. This was largely because enemies of the Church sometimes imposed cremation of the bodies of the faithful and the scattering of their ashes. This was in order to try to ridicule the Church's belief in the resurrection, or as a way of seeking to obliterate the memory of Catholic martyrs.

More recently the Church has permitted cremation. The former reasons for objecting to it do not generally apply, and there are often good environmental and social reasons for preferring cremation.

However cremation is not the same as burial. Cremation merely speeds up what would be the natural processes of disintegration of the mortal remains after death. When cremation has been completed, the ashes remain. These ashes are mortal remains. They should be reverently interred as soon as possible – as a sign of our continued care and reverence for the deceased, and our trust and expectation that God in his mercy will raise the dead to new life.

## Burial of Ashes

The Church provides a simple rite for the burial of ashes.

There is no set time by which the ashes must be interred, but it is best that the ashes be buried sooner rather than later, if only for the sake of reverence for the mortal remains of the deceased. That said, getting family members together for a final service will sometimes be difficult.

Two dates commend themselves – although clearly the burial can take place at any time.

- The first is on the month's mind – a month after the person died.
- The second is a year after their death, on the first anniversary of the death.

## Burial Service

The structure of the Church's service for the burial of ashes is as follows:

- Invitation to Prayer
- Scripture Verse
- Prayer of Committal
- The Lord's Prayer
- Blessing

It is usual to ask the priest to lead the service for the burial of the ashes, but the service can in fact be lead by anyone.

If you would like someone else (for example a member of the family) to lead the service, your priest can provide you with a copy of the rite and the prayers, or you can download it yourself from the Catholic Bishops' Conference Liturgy Office website: <http://www.liturgyoffice.org.uk/Resources/OCF/12-Ashes-A5.pdf>

### Place of burial

There is no particular place where the Church requires cremated remains to be buried. However it is most common for ashes to be interred in a dedicated cemetery or in a memorial garden. Some Catholic parishes have their own memorial gardens, but at present there are legal difficulties about that provision being made in every parish. Your parish priest will be able to advise if there are opportunities locally to inter cremated remains on church property. Alternatively your funeral director will be able to offer guidance as to what burial grounds are available locally.

Where ever ashes are buried it is intended by both Church and State that those ashes will remain there. Indeed, by law, once they have been buried cremated remains may not be removed without permission from the Home Office, and in some circumstances from the Church also.



*With faith and hope in the resurrection*

# Cremation and the Church