

FINAL RESTING PLACE: VATICAN RELEASES INSTRUCTION ON BURIAL, CREMATION-

Professing belief in the resurrection of the dead and affirming that the human body is an essential part of a person's identity, the Catholic church insists that the bodies of the deceased be treated with respect and laid to rest in a consecrated place. While the Catholic Church continues to prefer burial in the ground, it accepts cremation as an option, but forbids the scattering of ashes in the air, on land or sea and the growing practice of keeping cremated remains at home, or divided among relatives and making ornaments out of the remains.

"Caring for the bodies of the deceased, the church confirms its faith in the resurrection and separates itself from attitudes and rites that see in death the definitive obliteration of the person, a stage in the process of reincarnation or the fusion of one's soul with the universe,"
In 1963, the congregation issued an instruction permitting cremation as long as it was not done as a sign of denial of the basic Christian belief in the resurrection of the dead.

The result, approved by Pope Francis after consultation with other Vatican offices and with bishops' conferences and the Eastern churches' synods of bishops, is "Ad resurgendum cum Christo" ("To Rise with Christ"), an instruction "regarding the burial of the deceased and the conservation of the ashes in the case of cremation."
Presenting the instruction, Cardinal Müller said, "shortly, in many countries, cremation will be considered the ordinary way" to deal with the dead, including for Catholics. Cremation, in and of itself, does not constitute a denial of belief in the immortality of the soul and the resurrection of the body, the instruction says. Nor does it "prevent God, in his omnipotence, from raising up the deceased body to new life."

However, the Catholic church wholeheartedly recommends continuing the "pious practice of burying the dead," Müller said. It is considered one of the corporal works of mercy and, mirroring the burial of Christ, it more clearly expresses hope in the resurrection when the person's body and soul will be reunited.
In addition, he said, when a person is buried in the ground -- and, at least to some extent -- when the urn of the person's ashes is placed in a columbarium or tomb, the final resting place is marked with the person's name, the same name with which the person was baptized and by which the person is called by God.

"Belief in the resurrection of the flesh is fundamental," he said. "A human cadaver is not trash" and an anonymous burial or scattering of ashes "is not compatible with the Christian faith. The name, the person, the concrete identity of the person" is important because God created each individual and calls each individual to himself. What is more, he said, labeling an urn or tomb in a public place is an expression of belief in the "communion of saints," the unending unity in Christ of all the baptized, living and dead.

"Other believers have a right to pray at the tomb" and to remember deceased members of the Catholic church on the feast of All Saints and All Souls.
Keeping ashes at home on the mantel, he said, is a sign not only of love and grief, but also of not understanding how the loved one belonged to the entire community of faith and not just to his or her closest relatives.

Placing the ashes in a sacred place also "prevents the faithful departed from being forgotten or their remains from being shown a lack of respect," which is more likely to happen as time goes on and the people closest to the deceased also pass way, the instruction said.