

New Vatican *Instruction, To Rise With Christ, on the Care of Cremated Remains*

Recently, the Vatican's Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith issued an *Instruction, To Rise With Christ*, on the burial rites involving ashes / cremated remains of the deceased.

In issuing this *Instruction*, the Congregation noted that "the practice of cremation has notably increased in many countries, but simultaneously new ideas contrary to the Church's faith have also become widespread." Because of this, the *Instruction* is intended to emphasize the "pastoral reasons for the preference of the burial of the remains of the faithful and to set out norms pertaining to the conservation of ashes in the case of cremation."

Below are some questions which this *Instruction* might raise in the minds of Catholics in the Archdiocese:

Why are they changing the Rules on Cremation?

The rules that govern cremation after death for the Catholic Church are actually *not* changing! Since 1963 the Church has allowed cremation and since the early 1997 it has allowed a funeral liturgy in the presence of cremated remains. Even with these concessions, the Church has always stressed the importance of *burying* the remains of the faithful, either the body or the cremated remains.

In recent times, the practice of cremation has notably increased in many countries. Simultaneously, new and sometimes puzzling ideas contrary to the Church's vision of Christian burial have redirected the focus of Christian death (for example, cremated remains being used to make jewelry or other mementos).

Thus, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith has deemed opportune the publication of a new *Instruction*, with the intention of underlining, or re-emphasizing the doctrinal and pastoral reasons for the preference of the burial of the remains of the faithful and to set out norms for the conservation of cremated remains.

Is the prohibition of scattering ashes or keeping them in the home new?

No. These are not new prohibitions. What the *Instruction* is emphasizing is the Church's ancient tradition of preferring that the bodies of the deceased be buried. Noting that there are reasons one might choose to be cremated, the Church holds to that tradition of burying remains, because of what we believe about the Resurrection – that one day, Christ will return in glory and our bodies and souls will be reunited but will be remade on that last day, sharing the Glory of the Risen Christ.

Because of this, it is inconsistent with this belief to scatter the cremated remains of our deceased (into the air, on the ground, or in bodies of water) or to divide them, or to keep them in homes.

Then what are to be done with the cremated remains of a deceased loved one?

The *Instruction* notes that "when, for legitimate motives, cremation of the body has been chosen, the ashes of the faithful must be laid to rest in a sacred place, that is, in a cemetery or, in certain cases, in a church or an area, which has been set aside for this purpose... From the earliest times, Christians have desired that the faithful departed become the objects of the Christian community's prayers and remembrance. Their tombs have become places of prayer, remembrance and reflection. The faithful departed remain part of the Church who believes 'in the communion of all the faithful of Christ, those who are pilgrims on earth, the dead who are being purified, and the blessed in heaven, all together forming one Church'."

The Catholic Cemeteries of the Archdiocese of Chicago are always ready to assist families who are dealing with the death of a loved one, and if cremation has been chosen, the Cemeteries are able to provide options for burial or interment of the cremated remains.