The Care and Disposition of Cremated Remains

In December 2023, the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith issued a reply to His Eminence, Cardinal Matteo Maria Zuppi, Archbishop of Bologna, in answer to several questions concerning the preservation of ashes of the deceased following cremation. The Dicastery’s response centered on two issues: firstly, the possibility of providing for a sacred place for the commingled accumulation and preservation of ashes of the baptized, and, secondly, whether a family may be permitted to keep a portion of their family member’s ashes in a place that is significant for the history of the deceased.

Liturgical Memos

June 23:
Vigil of the Solemnity of Saint John the Baptist
On the evening of Sunday, June 23, the 12th Sunday in Ordinary Time should be celebrated at scheduled parish Masses. At other Masses, the prayers and readings for the Vigil Mass of the Nativity of Saint John the Baptist may be used.

On that same evening, Evening Prayer I of the Nativity of Saint John should be celebrated; however, Evening Prayer II of the 12th Sunday may be prayed in community gatherings.

June 29:
Solemnity of Saints Peter and Paul
On Saturday evening, June 29th, the texts for the 13th Sunday of Ordinary Time should be used at regularly scheduled parish Masses. At other Masses, the Solemnity of Saints Peter and Paul may be celebrated. Evening Prayer II of Saints Peter and Paul should be observed on June 29th.

See the June 2017 edition of Liturgy Update for additional information on the selection of liturgical texts on consecutive or overlapping solemnities.
In its reply, the Dicastery made reference to the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith’s recent Instruction on this same topic, *Ad resurgendum cum Christo*. In that 2016 document, the Congregation affirmed the 1963 ruling of the Holy See (*Piam et Constantem*) that, while “all necessary measures must be taken to preserve the practice of reverently burying the faithful departed,” cremation is not “opposed per se to the Christian religion.” Accordingly, the sacraments and funeral rites should not be denied to those who have asked that they be cremated, under the condition that this choice has not been made through “a denial of Christian dogmas.”

During the intervening decades, the practice of cremation increased in many countries, including the United States. In response to this development, the Congregation reiterated the constant teaching of the Church that the baptized truly participate in the life of the Risen Christ; furthermore, at the time of the resurrection of the just, God will give incorruptible life to the body and reunite it with the soul. This belief, the Congregation stated, is most fittingly expressed through burial of the deceased, which shows the “great dignity of the human body as an integral part of the human person whose body forms part of their identity” (*Ad resurgendum cum Christo*, 3). At the same time, the practice of cremation does not necessarily indicate a rejection of the Christian belief in the soul’s immortality or the resurrection of the body. As such, even though the Church continues to prefer that bodies of the deceased be buried, cremation is not prohibited, “unless it is chosen for reasons contrary to Christian doctrine” (*CIC*, can. 1176 § 3).

The Congregation also noted that, similar to the requirements for the disposition of the deceased body, ashes of the faithful should be laid to rest in a sacred place (e.g., a cemetery, church, or chapel) that has been set aside for this purpose and dedicated by the ecclesiastical authority. This preservation of ashes in a sacred location serves several complementary ends: it “ensures that [the deceased] are not excluded from the prayers and remembrance of their family or the Christian community. It prevents the faithful departed from being forgotten, or their remains from being shown a lack of respect, which eventuality is possible, most especially once the immediately subsequent generation has too passed away. Also, it prevents any unfitting or superstitious practices” (*Ad resurgendum cum Christo*, 3). For these same reasons, it is not appropriate to preserve ashes in a domestic residence, nor may ashes be divided amongst family members, scattered in the air, land, or sea, or preserved in mementoes,
pieces of jewelry, or other objects (Ad resurgendum cum Christo, 7). The Congregation stated that, while such observances are becoming increasingly popular, often for sentimental or cost-savings reasons, they do not constitute permitted Catholic practices.

In its most recent December 2023 statement, the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith again stressed that ashes of the deceased must be kept in a sacred place. It also recalled that the resurrection of the body “does not imply the recuperation of the identical particles of the matter that once formed the human being's body;” that is, “the resurrection can occur even if the body has been totally destroyed or dispersed.” The distribution of holy relics of the saints is one practical application of this principle.

With this in mind, the Dicastery offered the following guidance in its response:

- A “defined and permanent sacred place may be set aside for the commingled accumulation and preservation of the ashes of deceased baptized persons.”

This practice, similar to what occurs in ossuaries, is frequently observed in Italy and other European countries, where space for burials is limited.

- The ecclesiastical authority “may consider and evaluate a request by a family to preserve in an appropriate way a minimal part of the ashes of their relative in a place of significance for the history of the deceased person, provided that every type of pantheistic, naturalistic, or nihilistic misunderstanding is ruled out and also provided that the ashes of the deceased are kept in a sacred place.”

Here, the Dicastery foresees the possibility of reserving a smaller portion of ashes in a sacred place that is significant for the history of the deceased.

Following the publication of the Dicastery’s response, the USCCB’s Committee on Doctrine issued a letter to the Catholic Cemetery Conference in April 2024, indicating that these two accommodations address a particular pastoral situation in the Archdiocese of Bologna which is not applicable to the context of the United States. As such, the Committee recommended that the Congregation’s 2016 guidance concerning the preservation of ashes of the deceased in a sacred place continue to be followed in this country.
In parish ministry, clergy will sometimes learn from family and friends of their intention to reserve a portion of cremated remains apart from the primary place of interment. This provides a priest or deacon with the opportunity to offer catechesis on the usual manner of interring the body or cremated remains in a sacred place and to discourage the practice of keeping portions of ashes in non-sacred places (e.g., domestic residences, jewelry, etc.). With clarity and pastoral sensitivity, clergy should affirm the Church's belief concerning the resurrection of the dead and the importance of praying for the deceased, an act that is fostered by the interment of the body or ashes in a public and sacred place.

As the Order of Christian Funerals states, the Church commends the souls of the faithful departed “to the mercy of God in the sure and certain hope that all who have died with Christ will rise with him on the last day” (175). In accordance with the apostolic faith of the Church, and through the care with which they treat the mortal remains of the deceased, Christians profess their hope in the risen Christ as the “principle and source of our future resurrection” (Ad resurgendum cum Christo, 2).

Liturgical Preparation Aid for the Solemnity of the Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ

The Federation of Diocesan Liturgical Commissions (FDLC) has published a liturgy preparation aid for the Solemnity of the Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ (Corpus Christi). This preparation aid includes:

- Universal Prayer and Music Suggestions for Mass
- Guidelines for Eucharistic Processions
- Orders for the Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament, including Scripture and music suggestions during the period of exposition
- Vocabulary and Frequently Asked Questions

This resource may be downloaded from the FDLC website and distributed freely.
Liturgical Q and A: Revised Archdiocesan Policy for Confirming Previously Baptized Catholics

Last December, the Vicar General’s Office announced a change concerning the celebration of Confirmation for previously baptized Catholics during the Easter season in the Archdiocese of New York. The Liturgy Office has received a number of questions concerning the details of the revised practice and the reasons for this shift. The following brief commentary outlines some of the canonical underpinnings, liturgical theology, and pastoral motivations of the new policy:

It is the perennial tradition of the Church and the teaching of the *Code of Canon Law* that the original and ordinary minister of Confirmation is the bishop. In some limited cases, priests have been provided by the *Code* with the faculty to confirm, as in emergency situations, when baptizing an adult or child of catechetical age, and when receiving a validly baptized adult or child of catechetical age into full communion with the Church.

In the past, additional delegation was given to priests in the Archdiocese of New York during the Easter season to confirm both baptized Catholics who were never catechized and practicing Catholics who were not yet confirmed, when these candidates had participated in the process and catechesis of the RCIA or its equivalent.

In recent years, this special permission has been given greater scrutiny, especially in light of the canonical principle that the bishop is the ordinary minister of Confirmation. An added consideration is that, for many Catholics, the only time during their life that they will have an opportunity to personally interact with a bishop is at their Confirmation. This encounter with a successor to the apostles who has special care for the mission of the universal Church is an important milestone in the faith journey of Catholics, and it should be preserved whenever possible. Given these factors, a clarification was made this year to minimize those number of occasions when Catholics would not be confirmed by a bishop.

Accordingly, the current procedure is as follows:
• Baptized, uncatechized Catholic teens and adults who seek preparation for first communion and confirmation and who are enrolled in the catechumenal process may, in individual cases and with delegation from the vicar general, be confirmed and receive first communion from a priest within the Eucharistic liturgy during the Easter season (c. 137 §3).

• Priests may not confirm previously baptized Catholics who have received their first holy communion. Moving forward, this will be reserved to bishops.

As these practices are implemented, and given that Confirmation celebrations of adult Catholics will now take place more frequently in regional settings, parishes are encouraged to remember candidates for Confirmation at Mass during the Lenten and Easter seasons, especially in the homily and Prayers of the Faithful. By their reception of a special outpouring of the Holy Spirit, may these brothers and sisters in Christ be bound more intimately to the Church and led to defend the faith by word and deed as fervent witnesses to the Risen Lord.

**New Translations of the Order of Christian Initiation of Adults (OCIA)/ Ritual de la Iniciación Cristiana de Adultos (RICA) are Approved**

In late February, the USCCB announced that the new translations of the ritual books *Order of Christian Initiation of Adults (OCIA)* and *Ritual de la Iniciación Cristiana de Adultos (RICA)* were confirmed. The revised English translation follows the principles of *Liturgiam authenticam* (2001), while the Spanish text is similar to the 1990 US Spanish edition, with the correction of several errors and inconsistencies. Both editions retain the identical arrangement and numbering as the current USA editions.

The chapters in these new books have been slightly rearranged so that Part I (For the Catechumenate) is now marked as Chapter I, while the contents of Part II (For Particular Circumstances), is listed as chapters 2-6 (formerly nos. 1-5), thus presenting the entire text as a unified ritual book. Amongst the back matter, Appendix I contains combined rites, which are frequently used in the United States, and Appendix II includes a collection of acclamations, hymns, and chants. A newly revised and condensed set of *National Statutes* is presented at the beginning of the text.

While the new editions do not substantially alter the liturgical practices to be followed when preparing and initiating new Catholics, they do offer some helpful clarifications by using more precise titles for various groups of persons in the initiation process. For example, the revised texts translate the Latin term *candidatus* as “candidate” only when speaking of those who are already baptized, while this same term is translated as “inquirers,” “catechumens,” or “the elect,” when referring to these distinct groups.
Other new features in the revised translations include the addition of newly composed sample introductions for use when celebrating the combined rites for the unbaptized and the baptized:

Dear friends, this evening the Church welcomes diverse groups of people to the Sacraments of Initiation. For each of these, we give thanks and praise to God who has led them by various paths to unity in faith. First, we welcome our elect: they will be initiated into the Christian faith tonight through the Sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation, and the Eucharist. We will pray for them and they will profess our faith, and they will receive the gift of new life in Christ. (no. 567)

Another sample text is given for instructing the neophytes just prior to their reception of their First Holy Communion:

Dear neophytes, (on this most sacred night) you have been reborn by water and the Holy Spirit, and will receive, for the first time, the Bread of life and the Chalice of salvation. May the Body and Blood of Christ the Lord help you all to grow deeper in his friendship and in communion with the entire Church; may it be your constant food for the journey of life and a foretaste of the eternal banquet of heaven. Behold the Lamb of God... (no. 243)

Finally, the combined rites for the Easter Vigil include the translation of several texts from the 2011 revised English translation of the Roman Missal as well as those from the Order of Baptizing Children (2020).

The revised OCLA–RICA may first be used on the First Sunday of Advent, December 1, 2024, and the mandatory implementation date has been set for Ash Wednesday, March 5, 2025. The revised National Statutes for the Christian Initiation of Adults also becomes effective on December 1.
Updated Archdiocesan Guidelines for the Installation and Maintenance of Pipe Organs

In April, the Liturgy Office and archdiocesan Liturgical Music Commission published an updated set of guidelines for the installation and maintenance of pipe organs. Next to the church building itself, a pipe organ is often one of a parish’s most valuable assets and the preeminent liturgical appointment in its patrimony. When properly maintained, these instruments will give decades of faithful and reliable service to a parish community.

The newly revised and expanded document is intended to offer helpful guidance to pastors and parish musicians on a number of topics, including: the mechanics (action) of various types of pipe organs, purchasing a new instrument, whether to repair or replace an aging instrument, preparing an annual budget for organ maintenance, and the use of electronic instruments in lieu of a pipe organ.

The revised guidelines may be accessed and downloaded at the Liturgy Office website. Parishes are also encouraged to contact the Office of Liturgy or members of the archdiocesan Liturgical Music Commission with questions or when seeking assistance with organ-related questions.