

word on worship

CREMATION TODAY

"Father, I'm calling to arrange a memorial Mass for my mother. She died yesterday morning. We had her body cremated. My sister and I would like to have a Mass for her. We're thinking about 11 AM next Saturday, since that would be good for the family. Is that alright with you?"

It wasn't too long ago when such a telephone call to a Catholic priest would never have happened. But things have changed. More and more Catholics are now opting for cremation for themselves or their deceased loved ones. In the process Catholic funeral practices and rituals are sometimes being challenged, changed and even ignored. In this article I would like to examine the issues regarding cremation and the *Order of Christian Funerals*.

An Option In Law

Cremation became an option for Catholics in 1963 when the canonical ban against cremation was lifted by the Vatican. Today cremation is recognized by both canonical and liturgical law. The revised Code of Canon Law states, "The Church earnestly recommends that the pious custom of burying bodies of the dead be observed; it does not, however, forbid cremation unless it has been chosen for reasons which are contrary to Christian teaching." (Canon 1176, 3) The *Order of Christian Funerals* makes a similar statement. "For the final disposition of the body, it is the ancient Christian custom to bury or entomb the bodies of the dead; cremation is permitted, unless it is evident that cremation was chosen for anti-Christian

motives." (*Order of Christian Funerals* # 19)

While the Church prefers the interment or entombment of its deceased members in memory of the Lord Jesus whose own body was buried in the tomb, cremation is an option in law. It is also an increasing practice among Americans, including American Catholics. In fact a 1991 survey by *U.S. Catholic* reported that one third of American Catholics seemed to indicate a preference for cremation. [Richard Rutherford, "Cremation American Style: A Cultural Revolution for Catholics," *Worship*, Vol. 66, #6, (November 1992, p. 545)]

But what is often understood by cremation is not what is permitted by the Church nor is it in keeping with our traditional funeral practices. When people speak of cremation, very often they are referring to direct or immediate cremation of the body and immediate disposal of the cremated remains. Such services are often tastelessly advertised on the obituary pages of city newspapers. ("Direct Cremation, Only \$395") The body of the deceased is picked up at home or at the hospital and brought directly to the crematory. "Here today, gone today, and disposed of today." Afterward, the family may choose to have a private or public memorial service. Efficient, practical, cheaper, less demanding, less time consuming, less inconvenient for the living, more ecologically sensitive. And less Catholic!

The Proper Order

While the Catholic Church permits cremation, it foresees the *Order of Christian Funerals* being celebrated in the same way as if the body were to be interred or entombed. What is different when cremation takes place is only the final

is different when cremation takes place is only the final disposition of the body. Cremation does not mean the negation of the *Order of Christian Funerals*.

When the body of a deceased Catholic is to be cremated the usual parts of the *Order of Christian Funerals*, namely, the Vigil Service, the Funeral Liturgy and the Rite of Committal, should take place before the cremation. "From the perspective of liturgical law cremation is simply a technologically accelerated process of physical decomposition." [Richard Rutherford, "Honoring the Dead: Catholics and Cremation," *Worship*, Vol. 64, #6, (November 1990, p. 485)] In other words, cremation simply replaces burial or entombment. It does not set aside the *Order of Christian Funerals*.

When the body of a Catholic is to be cremated the following rites would ordinarily take place.

1. The Vigil for the Deceased would take place in the presence of the body. This vigil service could take place in the funeral home or in the church.
2. The Funeral Liturgy would take place with the body of the deceased present for the service. Two forms of the funeral liturgy are possible, the "Funeral Mass" or the "Funeral Liturgy outside of Mass." "When one of its members dies, the Church encourages the celebration of the Mass. But when Mass cannot be celebrated, the second form of the funeral liturgy is used." (Order of Christian Funerals #128) The funeral liturgy would include the reception of the body and the final commendation and farewell.
3. The Rite of Committal, "the conclusion of the funeral rites, is the final act of the community of faith in caring for the body of its deceased member. It may be celebrated at the... crematorium." (Order of Christian Funerals #204) In other words, following the funeral liturgy the community accompanies the body of the deceased to the place of cremation. The rite of committal is celebrated there with the appropriate choice of words dealing with cremation.
4. The disposition of the cremated remains would take place after they have been given to the family or funeral director. The cremated remains should be buried or entombed in a cemetery or placed in a niche in a columbarium (a structure in a cemetery or mausoleum specifically designed with niches to hold urns of cremated remains). (Order of Christian Funerals #406) At this time the Rite of Committal may be repeated. "On the second occasion the rite may include a longer Scripture reading as well as a

homily." (Order of Christian Funerals #212)

Other Situations

The order described above is the preferred and recommended way the funeral rites should be celebrated in the event of cremation. However, there may be times when cremation takes place before the Funeral Liturgy. This might occur, for example, if family members are scattered and unable to assemble for the funeral until a considerable time has passed. In this situation using the options within the *Order of Christian Funerals* the ritual might be adapted in the following way.

1. The Vigil for the Deceased would take place the usual way. The "wake" might be very short since in the situation we have described most of the family would not be able to be present.
2. Family and friends who were in the area would gather at the crematorium for the Rite of Committal with Final Commendation.
3. The Funeral Mass (or Funeral Liturgy without Mass) would be celebrated at a later time when all the family could attend. This Funeral Mass would be celebrated without the rite of reception or final commendation, since these rites suppose the body of the deceased is present. The Mass would begin and end in the usual way.
4. When the cremated remains were given to the family, they would be buried, entombed or placed in a niche using the Rite of Committal for a second time.

Another situation that might arise is described at the beginning of this article, that is, the parish is contacted after the body of the deceased has already been cremated. In this case the Rite of Committal would be celebrated when the cremated remains were buried, entombed or placed in a niche in the cemetery. Following the committal the people would go to the church for the celebration of the funeral Mass. The funeral Mass would not include rites associated with the body, namely, the reception of the body and the final commendation.

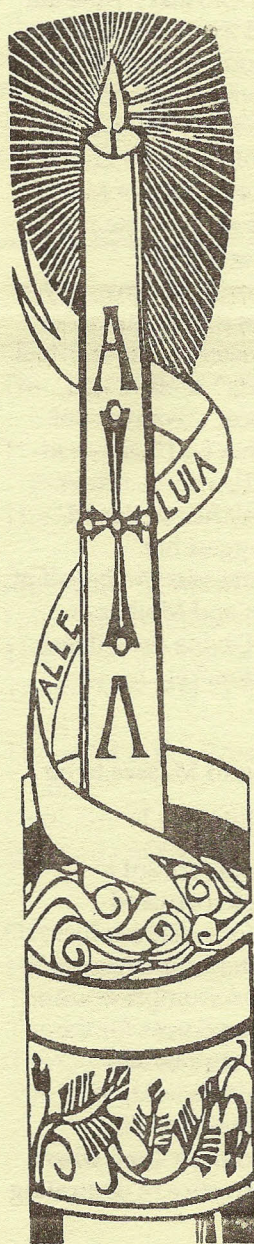
For the Body Only

It should be mentioned that in neither of the situations just described, nor in any other, should the funeral liturgy be celebrated in the presence of the cremated remains. As the Bishops' Committee on the Liturgy states:

"From the context of the paragraphs in #15 (of the

Praenotanda in the *Rite of Funerals*) it can be deduced that the burial Mass has been celebrated with the body of the deceased present before it was taken to the crematory. At the crematory, either in the chapel or in a room or hall of the crematory, the rite is celebrated which accompanies burial. It does not seem suitable to celebrate with the ashes present the rite which is intended to honor the body of the dead.... If the body of the deceased cannot be brought to the church for the funeral Mass prior to its cremation, the Mass can be celebrated... but without the ashes of the deceased present." [Bishops' Committee on the Liturgy Newsletter, Vol. 13, (March, 1977, p. 59)]

"The principal Roman Catholic reason (why cremated remains are not brought to church) is liturgical in the strict sense, having to do with the nature of symbol. It is the



body and not just the remains that is honored during the funeral liturgy." [Richard Rutherford, "Honoring the Dead: Catholics and Cremation," *Worship*, Vol. 64, #6, (November 1990, p. 486)]

In Canada, however, because of an indult granted by the Congregation for Divine Worship, the funeral liturgy may be celebrated in the presence of cremated remains. But each case must be judged by the bishop. "Each ordinary will judge whether it is pastorally proper to celebrate the liturgy for the dead, including eucharist, with the ashes present, taking into account the concrete circumstances in each case, with respect for the spirit and content of the current canonical norms." (Canadian edition of the *Order of Christian Funerals*, Appendix IV). In this situation, before the start of the liturgy, the urn bearing the cremated remains is placed without ceremony on a table in the sanctuary, away from the altar. The paschal candle is not used, and the prayers pertaining to the reception of the body are omitted. The rite of commendation is celebrated at the end but without the signs of farewell.

The Norm

While there are exceptions, the *Order of Christian Funerals* makes normative a funeral liturgy celebrated at church in the presence of the body of the deceased. This is the case whether burial, entombment or cremation is chosen as the means of final disposition.

The *Order of Christian Funerals* is the way that we as Catholics "offer worship, praise, and thanksgiving to God for the gift of a life which has now been returned to God, the author of life and hope of the just.... The celebration of the Christian funeral brings hope and consolation to the living. While proclaiming the Gospel of Jesus Christ and witnessing to Christian hope in the resurrection, the funeral rites also recall to all who take part in them God's mercy and judgment and meet the human need to turn always to God in times of crisis." (*Order of Christian Funerals* #5, 7) In this time of changing funeral practices may we faithfully follow the *Order of Christian Funerals*. In doing so we will affirm our belief in eternal life and our reverence for the body as a temple of God's life-giving Spirit.✠

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HELP WANTED!

We are looking for a volunteer to help us increase the circulation of *Word on Worship*. This person could work at home or at the Worship Office in Irvington. The work would require about 3 to 5 hours per week. If you would like more details please contact Fr. Robert Laferrera at 201-944-1061. We need you to help us improve the liturgical life of the Archdiocese. Please call!

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Collection of Masses of the Blessed Virgin Mary

At a time when the *Third Progress Report on the Revision of the Roman Missal* of ICEL has captured much of attention in the Catholic press, there scarcely exists a commentary on the *Collection of Masses of the Blessed Virgin Mary* (hereafter *Collection*), published in 1992. This is all the more intriguing since volume I, the Sacramentary, containing the eucharological texts includes some 46 new prefaces for the eucharistic prayer (the Roman Missal has 84!). Volume II, the Lectionary, consists of biblical readings that pertain to Mary's life and role in salvation history. In addition, rich homiletic material of an historical, liturgical, and pastoral nature can be found in the introductions which precede each of the formularies.

Where did this Collection come from?

The *Collection* was authorized by the Congregation for Divine Worship by a special mandate of Pope John Paul II. In 1988 an initial collection containing a selection of 12 Mass formularies was published. Now all 46 formularies are translated and available to us from Liturgical Press and Catholic Book Publishing Co. The sources for the material are drawn from the patristic and liturgical tradition of the East and West so as to produce a judicious blending of the old and the new. Because of the special nature of the *Collection*, it is published separately from the Roman Missal.

What is there?

The general introduction outlines Mary's role in the celebration of the mystery of Christ and demonstrates how the Masses of the Blessed Virgin Mary celebrate the action of God for our salvation. The power of Mary's example in the celebration of the liturgy is described in terms of exemplar, figure, and image (# 15). When the liturgy seeks to highlight her sanctity as the devoted handmaid of the Father and perfect disciple of Christ, she is called **exemplar**. She is called **figure** when her manner of life as virgin, spouse, and mother provides a portrait of the life of the Church

and the journey it takes in the following of the Lord. Finally, she who was perfectly fashioned in the likeness of her Son is called **image** insofar as she embodies what the Church intends to be.

Because of Mary's close association with the mystery of Christ, the 46 formularies are arranged according to the divisions of the liturgical year (# 24):

- Advent (3)
- Christmas (6)
- Lent (5)
- Easter (4)
- Ordinary Time (28)

The formularies for Ordinary Time are further subdivided into three sections. The first section comprises 11 titles either derived from sacred scripture or which express Mary's bond with the Church ("Mother of the Lord," "New Eve," "Holy Name of Mary," "Handmaid of the Lord," etc.). The second section contains 9 formularies honoring the memory of Mary under titles that relate to her cooperation in fostering the spiritual life of the faithful ("Mother and Mediatrix of Grace," "Fountain of Salvation," "Mother and Teacher in the Spirit," etc.). The third section consists of 8 formularies designed under titles that suggest her compassionate intercession on behalf of the faithful ("Queen and Mother of Mercy," "Mother of Divine Providence," "Mother of Consolation," etc.)

How is the Collection of Masses to be used?

First of all, the Masses are not meant to supplant but rather to complement and augment the existing Marian formularies already found in the Roman Missal; the two Marian prefaces and those for Immaculate Conception and Assumption are even reprinted in the *Collection*. Various norms for the specific use of the *Collection* in Marian shrines and sanctuaries are outlined. For our purposes here, the usefulness in parish and religious communities is especially evident on Saturdays in Ordinary Time when no obligatory memorial occurs. The practice of dedicating



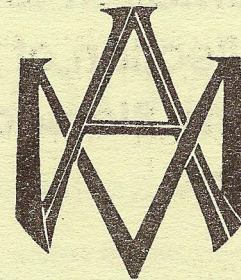
Saturday to the Blessed Mother arose in Carolingian monasteries in the eighth century and soon spread to the rest of Europe. This pious custom is now being restored as a way of introducing the Lord's Day. As we prepare to celebrate the weekly remembrance of the Lord's resurrection, we have an opportunity to look with reverence to Mary, who alone of all his disciples on that "great Sabbath" when Christ lay in the tomb, kept watch with full faith and hope and awaited his resurrection (# 36).

The formularies from the *Collection* may also be used when the choice of Masses is left open. However, the presider must take into account the spiritual benefit of the faithful and not impose his personal preference upon them. In particular, the progression of readings from the weekday Lectionary needs to be respected. During Advent, Christmas, Lent, and Easter the readings assigned to the seasonal Lectionary must be used in order to preserve the continuity of scripture. During Ordinary Time when a formulary from the Marian Sacramentary is selected, the option is given to take the readings either from the Marian Lectionary or from the weekday

Lectionary – whatever is more beneficial for the faithful (# 41).

In the wake of the *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy* of the Second Vatican Council, efforts were expended to make the devotional life of the Church more liturgical. Today, many feel the liturgies of the Church need to become more devotional. The *Collection of Masses of the Blessed Virgin Mary* is a happy blending of the devotional and liturgical traditions of the Church.✠

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ADVENT SEASON

The BVM, Chosen Daughter of Israel.
The BVM & the Annunciation of the Lord
The Visitation of The BVM.

CHRISTMAS SEASON

Holy Mary, Mother of God.
The BVM, Mother of the Savior
The BVM & and Epiphany of the Lord.
The BVM & the Presentation of the Lord.
Our Lady of Nazareth
Our Lady of Cana

LENTEN SEASON

Holy Mary, Disciple of the Lord
The BVM at the Foot of the Cross, I
The BVM at the Foot of the Cross, II
The Commending of The BVM
The BVM, Mother of Reconciliation

EASTER SEASON

The BVM & the Resurrection of the Lord
Holy Mary, Fountain of Light and Life
Our Lady of the Cenacle
The BVM, Queen of Apostles

ORDINARY TIME SECTION 1

Holy Mary, Mother of the Lord
Holy Mary, the New Eve
The Holy Name of The BVM
Holy Mary, Handmaid of the Lord
The BVM, Temple of the Lord
The BVM, Seat of Wisdom
The BVM, Image & Mother of the Church, I
The BVM, Image & Mother of the Church, II
The BVM, Image & Mother of the Church, III
The Immaculate Heart of The BVM
The BVM, Queen of All Creation

ORDINARY TIME SECTION 2

The BVM, Mother & Mediatrix of Grace
The BVM, Fountain of Salvation
The BVM, Mother and Teacher in the Spirit
The BVM, Mother of Good Counsel
The BVM, Cause of our Joy
The BVM, Pillar of Faith
The BVM, Mother of Fairest Love
The BVM, Mother of Divine Hope
Holy Mary, Mother of Unity

ORDINARY TIME SECTION 3

Holy Mary, Queen & Mother of Mercy
The BVM, Mother of Divine Providence
The BVM, Mother of Consolation
The BVM, Help of Christians
Our Lady of Ransom
The BVM, Health of the Sick
The BVM, Queen of Peace
The BVM, Gate of Heaven

Word on Worship

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