

My Neighbor Said:

# “Are Cremated Remains Allowed at a Funeral Mass?”

*“My neighbor said her pastor has told the congregation that the cremains are not to be brought into the nave for a funeral Mass—that the only acceptable funeral rite has the casket with the deceased’s [uncremated] remains.”*

The Catholic Church “clearly prefers and urges that the body of the deceased be present for the funeral rites, since the presence of the human body better expresses the values which the Church affirms in those rites” (*Order of Christian Funerals*, Appendix on Cremation, no. 413). However, this is not always possible. Although there was a time when cremation was actively discouraged, the Church today recognizes and accepts it as an alternative burial practice, “unless it has been chosen for reasons which are contrary to Christian teaching” (e.g., denial of the Resurrection of the body; *Code of Canon Law*, 1176 §3).

The Church prefers that cremation, if it is chosen, take place after a funeral Mass. Nevertheless, in 1997, bishops in the United States were given permission by the Vatican’s Congregation of Divine Worship and Discipline of the Sacraments to allow cremated remains (often called “cremains”) to be present at a funeral Mass. The instructions for a funeral Mass in the presence of cremains have been incorporated into the *Order of Christian Funerals*, the Catholic Church’s official document on funeral practices. Today, those instructions are widely used throughout the country (including the Diocese of Richmond) to conduct funeral Masses where cremains are present.

Two things are worth noting here. First, **a preference is not a requirement**. The Church has provided a liturgical option for funeral Masses in the presence of cremains. It is therefore incorrect to say that the only acceptable Catholic funeral rite is one in which the deceased person’s uncremated body is present.

Second, the Congregation of Divine Worship and Discipline of the Sacraments gave U.S. bishops the authority to allow cremains at a funeral Mass. **Decisions that are reserved to the bishop cannot be overruled by those under him**. It is up to the bishop, not a priest, to decide whether funeral Masses in his diocese may be held in the presence of cremains.

**For further reading:** [Cremation and the Order of Christian Funerals](#) (U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops); [“Is It Required That the Bodily Remains or Cremains Be Present at a Catholic Funeral?”](#) (Catholic Answers)

Do you have questions about God, faith, life, the Church, or other related topics? Drop them into the Question Box next to the Parish Bulletin Board. We will answer them ASAP and post them in FlockNotes and on the Bulletin Board each week.