

Tridentine Community News

July 26, 2026 – Ninth Sunday After Pentecost

The Sacred Duty of Christian Burial: The Church's Perennial Teaching on the Burial of the Dead and the Discipline Regarding Cremation Part 2 of 2

By James Murphy

The 2016 Instruction *Ad resurgendum cum Christo*

To address widespread confusion, the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith (then known as the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith) issued the Instruction *Ad resurgendum cum Christo* in 2016.

This important document reaffirmed that burial of the body remains the preferred practice because it more clearly manifests faith in the resurrection.

The Instruction also established several important norms concerning cremated remains.

The ashes of the deceased:

- must be treated with the same reverence owed to the human body
- are to be kept in a sacred place such as a cemetery, church, or mausoleum
- are not to be kept permanently in private homes except in extraordinary circumstances permitted by ecclesiastical authority;
- may not be divided among family members
- may not be fashioned into jewelry, works of art, or keepsakes
- may not be scattered on land, at sea, or in the air

These prohibitions are not arbitrary regulations but safeguards of Christian doctrine concerning the dignity of the human person and the resurrection of the body.

Practices Condemned by the Church

The Church condemns any treatment of human remains that expresses ideas contrary to the Christian faith.

Among these are:

- choosing cremation as a denial of the resurrection
- selecting cremation out of hatred for Christianity or rejection of Catholic doctrine
- scattering ashes to symbolize dissolution into nature or the universe
- preserving ashes as household mementos
- dividing ashes among relatives
- incorporating ashes into jewelry, artwork, or decorative objects
- reducing the deceased to an object of sentimental possession rather than honoring the body as destined for resurrection

Such practices often arise from pantheistic, naturalistic, secular, or nihilistic philosophies that contradict the revealed truth concerning the destiny of the human person.

Why Burial Remains the Preferred Practice

The Church's preference for burial rests upon several profound theological principles.

Burial:

- imitates the burial of Christ
- visibly proclaims belief in the resurrection of the body
- manifests hope in eternal life
- preserves the integrity of the body
- provides a sacred place for prayer and remembrance
- bears witness to the communion of saints

The Christian cemetery itself becomes a visible testimony to faith. It is not merely a place of mourning but a place of hopeful expectation, where the faithful await the glorious return of Christ.

A Traditional Catholic Reflection

Traditional Catholic theology has always regarded Christian burial as one of the final acts of charity rendered to the faithful departed. The body that once knelt before the altar, received Holy Communion, and was anointed with the sacred oils deserves to rest with dignity until the trumpet of the Archangel shall sound.

Although the Church now permits cremation under certain conditions, this concession should never be mistaken for an abandonment of her ancient preference. Rather, it represents a pastoral accommodation to changing circumstances while firmly maintaining the unchanging truths of the Catholic faith.

Whenever reasonably possible, Catholic families should continue the venerable custom of earth burial. In doing so, they unite themselves to the practice of countless generations of Christians, imitate the burial of Our Blessed Lord, and give eloquent witness to the Creed they profess each Sunday: "I look forward to the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come."

Conclusion

The Church's teaching on Christian burial is ultimately a proclamation of hope. Death does not have the final word. The body committed reverently to the earth is not abandoned but entrusted to God in expectation of the resurrection promised by Christ.

Whether the body is buried or, in legitimate circumstances, cremated, the faithful are called to treat the mortal remains of the deceased with profound reverence, avoiding every practice that obscures the truths of the Gospel. Christian burial thus remains not merely a funeral custom but a solemn profession of faith in Jesus Christ, "the Resurrection and the Life" (John 11:25), Who shall one day transform our lowly bodies to be like His glorious Body and gather His faithful into the everlasting Kingdom.

Tridentine Masses This Coming Week

Tue. 07/28 7:00 PM: Low Mass at *St. Benedict/Holy Name of Mary, Windsor* (Ss. Nazarius & Celsus, Martyrs; Victor I, Pope & Martyr; and Innocent I, Pope & Confessor)