

# Our Faith Today

Lent, while a season of penance, sacrifice, and conversion, is also a time to face the truth of life, that we are all mortal. The ashes we were marked with a few weeks ago remind us of this but it is never meant to be a morbid subject. We Christians, because of Jesus Christ, laugh in the face of death knowing that Christ has conquered death and we have the promise of eternity and God's mercy.

I thought I might bring up an issue I've mentioned before and one that I personally feel strongly about and about which the Church has had to deal: whether it is permissible for Catholics to cremate a loved one after death. While this practice is becoming more and more popular, it is essential that we all review where the Church stands on this and why. Simply said, as we read in the Catholic funeral rite: **"The 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."** The human body is not incidental to who we are – body and soul – and once a person dies, the funeral liturgy becomes a powerful proclamation of our faith and hope. We stand beside death and proclaim that though this loved one has died, we know that Jesus has overcome the power of death. He has risen and so will we one day. Much is to be said about the positive psychological impact of closure when the body is also present for a funeral.

I bring this up not to say that cremation is wrong. The Church assures us that the presence of the cremains sometime may be the better choice and those remains are to be treated with the same dignity and respect as if the body was present. If one chooses to donate their body to medical research or donate organs that is certainly to be admired. But the overall preference, in the majority of cases, is that the body of the deceased be present for the funeral liturgy and cremation, if so chosen, take place afterwards. I know this is sensitive but I think it is an opportunity for us to see the big picture.

The white pall of baptism, the sprinkling of the body with blessed water, the book of the scriptures and the cross, all placed on the casket of the deceased are powerful testimonies not only to that person but to all we believe about our lives as Christians. The tall Easter candle and the incensing of the remains afterwards likewise symbolize the sanctity of the human person (soul *and* body) both in life and death, in the presence of the risen Christ. There's nothing like a funeral liturgy to remind us of who we are. Yet, I know it is sad and somewhat uncomfortable.

I've lost my Father and my older brother but it is a fact of life and what better time to seek strength in our faith. So consider your life insurance policies and make provision for funeral expenses. Shop around with funeral directors. Consider a cremation casket – simple and dignified – to be used for the Mass. There are certainly other ways to minimize expenses without minimizing the power of our beautiful Christian faith.

If you like, take a look at my blog for more reflections on this. The entry is entitled: *Body and Soul*. We have a link on the parish website for my blog so just click on that.

May our continued Lenten journey lead us all to the joy of the Easter season.

God bless you all,

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