

Continuing one of the local customs here at St. Mary's that I was happy to inherit when I became pastor almost three years ago is that of giving a four minute teaching before Mass in the seasons of Lent or Advent. These brief teachings before Mass give me an opportunity to present a topic at all the Masses that I might not ordinarily talk about in a homily. We will have four minute teachings throughout the weekends of Lent again this year.

I have been looking for a good opportunity to speak about an instruction on cremation that came from the Vatican back in October of this past year. The instruction begins by reminding us that the Resurrection of Jesus Christ is the basis of our hope for Eternal Life. It then goes on to say that burial is the most fitting way to express our faith and hope in the resurrection of the body. Our Catholic Faith teaches us that our bodies will rise again on the last day. In Heaven we will not become Angels, but we will continue to be human beings. An essential part of being human is having a body and a soul. After the resurrection of the dead, in which we profess our faith each week during the Creed, we will be whole: body and soul. When Jesus rose from the dead He was not a body-less spirit, but He had a real resurrected body, one that could be touched, yet could also appear and disappear at will. All the Saints in Heaven will have resurrected bodies, as Our Lord does, after the resurrection at the end of time.

This is part of the reason for the importance of burying the dead. Burying the dead is a corporal work of mercy, and it corresponds to the respect due to the bodies of the faithful departed who through Baptism have become temples of the Holy Spirit.

The Church allows cremation, as long as it is not done for a motive contrary to the Faith, yet the cremated remains should always be treated with great respect and they are to be buried or interred in a cemetery. This guarantees that the faithful departed will be prayed for by the

Church and remembered beyond the surviving generation; it is also the best way to ensure proper respect due to the cremated remains.

The Vatican document concludes by stating that the reservation of ashes of the departed in a domestic residence is not permitted. It is also not permitted to scatter the ashes of the faithful departed in the air, on land, at sea, or in some other way; nor may they be preserved in mementos, pieces of jewelry, or other objects.

I realize, of course, that mistakes can be made out of ignorance. If someone acted without knowledge, there is no sin. Sin is always a choice that we knowing and freely make. If a mistake has been made that can be rectified, such as ashes that still need to be buried, that situation should be rectified as soon as possible.

If you have any questions, do not hesitate to contact me by email or by calling the office. I am happy to help you in any way that I am able. Let us remember to keep those who have gone before us in our prayers.

Eternal rest grant unto them, O Lord. And let perpetual light shine upon them. May their souls and all the souls of the faithfully departed through the mercy of God rest in peace. Amen.