

On Death XXIII

**After the ceremony of Cremation, what then becomes our link to the deceased?
Properly, it is entombment of the remains.**

Ashes or “cremains” as they are called are intended by the Church to be placed after the Mass into a niche at a cemetery or mausoleum. In all events they are never to be scattered, or worse taken home and placed on the mantle, a practice that has developed recently which is completely forbidden by the Catholic Church. Because we believe in the resurrection of the body, we reverence the remains, whether they be a full body burial, or ashes. I know that people say they would like their ashes to be scattered over their favorite spot, but when you have done that, those who remain have nowhere to go to honor you. One of the reflections from death-camp survivors after the Holocaust was that they had nowhere to visit, as the Nazis dumped the ashes of the Jews and others into the river. For better or worse having a grave or a niche to visit humanizes those who remain. We can go to a place to remember them and offer a prayer. What would have happened had they cremated Jesus’ body after his death on the cross, and then scattered the ashes? Of course God could raise him from whatever condition, but the strong tradition of the “empty tomb” would have been meaningless. Because we are in Christ and await the resurrection of our own bodies, the church has always buried and then kept sacred the burial place. You can go even today to the catacombs outside Rome to see the burial places of those ancient first Christians. We too participate in this holy tradition.

IHM Pray for us.

Fr. Jerry