

Our Lady of the Rosary Chapel

2ND SUNDAY AFTER EASTER

Incineration or Cremation of Corpses

Introduction

Since her foundation and throughout her history, the Catholic Church has considered the practice of incinerating the corpses of the dead as something abominable. Even the history of nations proves that this practice was more propagated among the more primitive peoples or human groups but not so among the more developed ones. In spite of the Catholic conscience among the peoples, the weakening of the Catholic position, the propagation of liberal ideas, and the very attitude of the men who occupy the important offices in the Hierarchy of the Church, give to this moral question an urgency that it did not have a few years ago, more so if we consider the new dispositions of the new Canon Law and the changes introduced by "Pope" Paul VI.

1. Definition

According to the etymology:

"cremation" : lat. *cremare* : to burn.

"incineration" : lat. *in-cinis* : in ashes.

So it is the violent destruction of a human corpse by means of fire or great heat. It can be a religious or civil rite.

"Inhumation" - noun

An act of placing a body in a grave or tomb:

2. History

Many primitive peoples have known incineration:

a. The Pre-Canaanites

Incineration existed among the indigenous neoliths of the land of Canaan. In a funeral cave in the excavation of Gezer, information has been discovered which shows that this funeral rite existed back when the first peoples settled on the hill, during the fourth century before Jesus Christ. The ashes found there were recognized as belonging to human remains. They had been produced by a prolonged incineration, either violent to the point where nothing but a mass of whitish dust was left of the whole body or having left the remains of incompletely calcined bones amid the black ash. The number of cadavers was calculated at more than a hundred. It is the only example found in Palestine to date.

The Semitic populations that followed in the area of Palestine which have been called "Canaanites" introduced and conserved inhumation as their form of burial. The investigations have verified the regular persistence of this from the year 2500 B.C. to 600 A.D. The Jews had the custom of burying their dead and establishing cemeteries outside their cities. They would inhumate the bodies of their enemies, dead in battle, even after a victory, and Ezequiel's vision (Ez. xxxix) is in conformity with the customs in practice at the time in Israel. The mosaic legislation even ordained the inhumation of criminals, whose bodies would have had to have been buried the same day as their execution (Deut. xxi:22-23). The history of the Jewish People, recorded in the Holy Books, makes no mention of any occurrence of incineration of bodies, except in exceptional circumstances, such as war or plague (I Kings xxxi:12-13 and Amos vi:9-10). The heathen Acaz, king of Juda, had his own son burned in honor of Moloch (pagan divinity) (IV Kings xvi:3; II Paralip. xxviii:3). Sacred Scripture calls this rite "the abomination of the Amonites." (III Kings xi:5)

b. The Egyptians and Chaldeans

The Egyptians buried their dead. The Nile Valley is full of tombs. Nevertheless, in archaic Egypt, the king was burned with his monumental tomb. But the monarch was inhumed beforehand, and the fire that consumed the cadaver was supposed to reduce the whole monument to ashes, so that the god-king could make his way to heaven more easily, where he was supposed to be reunited with those of his race.

According to a reference from Herodotus, the Babylonians would mummify their corpses in honey; and they would carry them to lower Chaldea, so as to join them, after death, to their ancestors. The Chaldeans would generally inhumate their dead. Nevertheless many preferred the pyre to a simple laying in the tomb. The rite of burying the head was introduced in this area by the Semites, when they arrived.

c. The Persians

The Persians buried their dead; the royal tombs are proof of that. They punished the incineration of cadavers with the death sentence, and had special rules to purify the fire that had been stained with such an abomination. (They adored fire as a divinity.)

d. The Greeks

In primitive Greece, inhumation was the general rule and universally adopted for the

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2nd Sunday after
Easter

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Our Lady of the Rosary

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HOLY MASS

Sundays: 7:00 & 10:00 am
Weekdays: 8:00 am

CONFESSIONS

Sundays
6:40—6:55 am
9:15—9:55 am

Weekdays

7:40—7:55 am
and by appointment

HOLY ROSARY

Sundays: After 7:00 am Mass
and at 9:40 am

First Saturdays: after 8:00 am
Mass

DURING THE EASTER
SEASON, WE PRAY THE
REGINA CAELI, until the
feast of the Holy Trinity,
and we continue the
ALLELUIA AND GLORIAS.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Fr. Rodriguez:

My Mass intentions are filled until April 27th, and I sent a list for Bp. Morello. You may see it placed in the back.

EASTER DUTY

means Confession and Communion once a year at this time.

Eastertide ends on the Feast of the Most Holy Trinity, May 22nd.

CATHOLIC ACTION

- 1) Next Sunday, April 10th, please join us for a Greek Brunch after the 10 am Mass.
- 2) Please place marked tag sale items on the kitchen counter anytime between now and the tag sale, June 10th and 11th.
- 3) A Catholic Action meeting will be held the last Sunday of the April, at 12 noon.

burial of the dead for many centuries. The reason for employing this means of interment was that inhumation was more in conformity with the ancient Greeks' beliefs regarding life after death than cremation.

Nevertheless in Homer's time the rite of cremation was introduced among the Greeks as an alternative to inhumation. Both rites were used simultaneously, as can be found clearly established. What is more, if cremation was not unknown in continental Greece, it was not practiced there more than exceptionally. Likewise, above all during the classical period, Greece continued to be faithful to the practice of inhumation. Even the law prescribed "to inter and put in the tomb any body that might be found accidentally.

All of this is proved by the Herodotus' testimony (in his History, Erastus, LVI) as well as Plutarch's ("*Vita Licurgi*") and Thucydides (Bk. II) and Euripides' (Suplic. V. 7.). It is only in the Roman era that incineration came to be more popular than burial, to later disappear under the influence of Christianity.

e. The Romans

Inhumation was the rite primitively adopted for sepulture and cremation only appeared in the more advanced periods of the Republic (Pliny, 1, VII, c.XLIV). Nevertheless this practice was never so dominant as to supplant inhumation completely. That is why Numa forbade that his body be burned. Cremation was never used for deceased children. In the end, even under the Empire, even though cremation was prevalent, inhumation was not completely excluded. From the Anthonies onward, burials by inhumation were more frequent. By the fifth century cremation had fallen in disuse.

f. Among Christians

The Church never, in any period of her history, adopted the rite of cremation for the sepulture of her dead. Since her origin, she has consecrated inhumation, used among the Semites, as an inviolable practice; and the first faithful would recover, endangering their lives in the act, the remains of her martyrs in order to piously bury them. The persecutors would sometimes purposely burn the martyrs' bodies and throw their ashes to the wind or in the rivers. They believed that in this way they offended the faith in the resurrection. (Minutius Felix, Octavius II. P.L.t.III, col.267).

That the Church always gave testimony to this absolute fidelity to the rite of inhumation, we have imposing proof, in the first centuries of the Christian era, in the existence of the Roman Catacombs.

The Church fought against the practice of pagan cremation, which was accompanied by rites that were incompatible with the Christian faith. Nevertheless, there was a time when certain Christians tried more or less to honor the rite of cremation among them, or something similar to it. Against this intent we find the documents "*Detestandæ Feritatis*," "*De Sepulturis*," "*Extravag. Commun.*," in which Boniface VIII decrees that those who cause the

bodies of the dead to suffer, by fire, a treatment so pagan and cruel, instead of laying them intact in the sepulcher that they had chosen, will be ipso facto excommunicated, and, moreover, that the remains of those corpses will be deprived of ecclesiastical burial: "*Ordinamus ut circa corpora defunctorum hujus modi abusus vel similes nullatenus observetur [. . .] sed ut sic impie crudeliter non tractentur.*"

We will have to arrive at the time of the Revolution of 1789 to assist at a new try by the promoters of cremation.

Nevertheless it was only in the last quarter of the nineteenth century that the idea of cremation took some consistence in Europe, when the Masonic societies obtained from the governments the official recognition of this rite.

3. Traditional Ecclesiastical Discipline

In itself cremation, doubtless, does not contain anything that intrinsically conflicts with any Catholic dogma, not even that of the resurrection of the dead, which is not any more difficult than in the case of inhumation when you consider divine omnipotence. On the other hand, there is no divine law that formally forbids it.

"It is not evil in itself, *per se* (in which case it would never ever be permitted), but it is neither a purely positive law." (Roberti: Diccionario de la Teología Moral, art. "Cremación," p.317)

Nevertheless it is in opposition to the practical discipline constantly adopted by the Church since her foundation. That is why, considering the outbreak of ideas favorable to cremation, sponsored above all by the sects, enemies of the Christian Faith, the Church pronounced three decrees of the Holy Office, on May 19, 1886; December 15, 1886 and July 27, 1892.

a. Decrees of the Holy Office

i. May 19, 1886

The Holy Office indicated at the beginning the reasons which occasioned the declaration on the question. In the presence of the attempts of certain men, recruited especially among the members of Masonic sects, to restore the pagan practices of cremation, even going so far as to form particular societies for its defense, being afraid that some souls should be seduced by their contrivances and thus little by little the due respect for the Christian practice of inhumation, always observed by the Church, might be broken.

Here are the principal questions answered by this decree:

Is it permitted to give one's name to those societies whose purpose is to promote the use of burning the bodies of the dead? – No. And, if it regards the societies affiliated to the Masonic sect, one would incur in the canonical penalties of the same.

MASS SCHEDULE

SUNDAY April 10	SECOND SUNDAY AFTER EASTER	W	7:00 am 10:00am	Superior's Intentions Missa pro Populo.
MONDAY April 11	St. Leo the Great. PCD	W	8:00 am 7:30 pm	Ray and Isaura Abed Holy Rosary for the Poor Souls
TUESDAY April 12	Ferial Day Votive Mass of Angels	W	8:00 am	Ray and Isaura Abed
WEDNESDAY April 13	SOLEMNITY OF ST. JOSEPH St. Hermenegild, M	W	8:00 am	Gazy Family
THURSDAY April 14	St. Justin, M Within the Octave of St. Joseph, St. Tuburtius & Companions, Mm	R	8:00am	Mary and George Schmitt R.I.P.
FRIDAY April 15	Within the Octave of St. Joseph	W	8:00am	Gabriel McNeal
SATURDAY April 16	Within the Octave of St. Joseph	W	7:00am	Desi Torres Sr. R.I.P.
SUNDAY April 17	THIRD SUNDAY AFTER EASTER	W	7:00 am 10:00am	Superior's Intentions MISSA PRO POPULO



MASS TIMES AT ST. MARY THE VIRGIN

1520 Delaware St, Paulsboro, New Jersey 08066

April 10	5:00 pm.	Fr. Rodriguez
April 17	9:30 am.	Fr. Bachtiger
April 24	5:00 pm.	Fr. Rodriguez
May 1	9:30 am.	Fr. Bachtiger

*Mass may be cancelled in the event of inclement weather.

Call Mrs. Mary Bocchino for any information: 856 228 4450 or Mrs. Windfeld 856 4564232

Devotions: Monday April 11, at 7:30 p.m.
Holy Rosary, and St. Joseph Litany
for the Poor Souls in Purgatory.



NOTICE TO NEWCOMERS

Founded in 1973 in the wake of the disastrous Second Vatican Council, the mission of Our Lady of the Rosary Chapel is to maintain and restore as far as possible the traditional faith, values and liturgical practice of the Roman Catholic Church, and to provide a haven of sanctity where men and women of good will may grow in love for God and their neighbor.

Please don't hesitate to introduce yourself and ask questions. After Mass come to the Social Hall, and join us for coffee and refreshments.

We hope your visit with us is a pleasant one, and we look forward to seeing you again and welcoming you as a member of Our Lady of the Rosary.

We welcome Spanish-speaking guests, and confessions are heard in Spanish and English every Sunday and by appointment with the pastor.

Is it permitted to leave an order of cremation for oneself or for someone else? – No.

Pope Leo XIII confirmed and approved this decree.

ii. December 15, 1886

By virtue of which those who, by their own will, have had their bodies destined to be cremated, and have persevered in a definite and notorious manner until their death in this blameworthy disposition, should be deprived of ecclesiastical burial: *“qui propria voluntate cremationem elegerunt, et in hac voluntate certe et notorie usque ad mortem perseveraverunt.”*

iii. July 27, 1892

Regulating different practical questions regarding the administration of the Sacraments to those who have asked that their bodies be burned after their death, and also regarding the public application of Mass for them.

b. The Church's Reasons

On what motives has the Church based her condemnation of the use of cremation?

The first reason which can justify the legislation of the Church regarding cremation is that, in the majority of cases, it appears surrounded by particular circumstances which make it a public profession of irreligion and materialism. But even in the hypothesis in which cremation were not to carry with it any sign of irreligion at all or any scandal, it should not be preferred to the practice of inhumation, and this for a various motives: To begin with a motive of

Christian sense, and which is, moreover, simple humanity. Indeed, what an unworthy manner to treat this body which, in contact with its soul, has been the instrument of so many virtues, this body which the Sacraments have sanctified and in which the Holy Eucharist has laid the seed of resurrection! Moreover filial piety, conjugal love, paternal love, and even friendship will always have difficulty with according to this violent and harsh destruction of a body which, during its life, has been surrounded by so much affection and so many attentions. Moreover so many rites and prayers of Christian burial would lose their meaning, so beautiful and so old, if they were applied to a deceased person whose cadaver had to pass through the crematory oven. The Church, faithful guardian of her ceremonies, is in her rights to refuse them to anyone who rejects this sense which is so profoundly religious.

Inhumation is a very apt way to remind the Christian faithful a great number of the truths of religion; and also to deepen in their hearts, above all, the dogma of the immortality of the soul and the future resurrection with Jesus Christ.

We have the example of Christ, Whose sacred Body was placed in a sepulcher.

Religious piety sees as most convenient for the human body, as much in itself as in virtue of the Christian Religion, and by reason of such a dignity, that it should not be destroyed by the violence of fire but rather by the slow action of the natural forces.

The human body has been formed by

God in a completely singular way; it is an essential part of the rational substance; it was assumed by the Son of God to realize in it and by it the Redemption of Mankind and has been placed in Heaven at the right hand of the Father after His glorious Resurrection. Moreover, in the case of Christians, it is sanctified by the Sacraments and it is the temple of the Holy Ghost (I Cor. iii: 16) and member of the Body of Christ (I Cor. vi: 15) and awaits glorious resurrection.

Inhumation is the only manner which is in accordance with the sense of the words of Sacred Scripture. (Gen. iii: 19; I Cor. xv:42)

c. Traditional Morals regarding Cremation

The Church has not only demonstrated that inhumation is more convenient to Christian sense, but also and for a threefold reason, that cremation is illicit:

Because it conflicts with the sense of Christian and natural piety;

It is favored and promoted by those who want to move others away from the hope of resurrection, pushing them toward materialism;

It conflicts with the constant discipline of the Church, for which reason it is attacked by the enemies of the Church. The contrary doctrine is condemned by a positive law of the Church: Holy Office, July 19, 1926 (AAS XVIII, p.282) and by Canon 1203, 1.

(TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK)

OUR LADY OF FATIMA TOUR

We are organizing a pilgrimage to Fatima next year in June. Those who are interested, see the information placed on the board downstairs or contact Mrs. Dicecco. 203-378-2763

VISIT US ON THE WEB

For up-to-date information, such as last-minute changes to the Mass schedule, special prayer requests, and other breaking news, refer to our website at: