

Dear Friends,

Today is the Feast of All Souls; a day in which we lift to God all our loved ones who have gone before us “marked with the sign of faith.” From Halloween through All Souls, we focus a great deal of our spiritual attention on the dead. Kids still dress up as goblins and ghouls on Halloween. This year, we encouraged kids to dress up as their favorite saints and we had a saints parade after the 10:30 Mass. It was a lot of fun. We share our lives on earth in communion with the saints and our loved ones who have died. That communion, like Holy Eucharist, is to be celebrated, even as we mourn.

In this letter, I would like to focus on a topic that relates to the theme of these days; that is cremation. A little over ten years ago the Church changed its position on bringing cremated remains into the Church for the Mass of the Resurrection. The Church has, for many years, discouraged the practice of bringing cremated remains into the sanctuary for the funeral Mass. So, people who chose cremation would have to borrow a casket for the funeral Mass and the body would be cremated after the funeral. While cremation is still not the preferred option, the Church does allow funeral Masses with cremated remains. However, the Church still sees the burial of the dead in a casket with a burial vault as the most dignified option.

The reality, though, is that funeral costs are high, and more people are choosing cremation. There is one non-negotiable, though: even the cremated remains of a Catholic must be buried with the rites of Christian burial. We do not allow Catholics to keep the cremated remains of their loved ones in their homes. They are never to be spread into the wind, the sea, a favorite fishing hole or campground, or natural setting. Cremated remains are not to be left on a fireplace mantle for the cat to knock over. We see the human body as sacred and the Church has always used the burial of a Christian body as the only option after death.

While cremation is chosen because it is the most cost effective means for disposing of a human body, I find it ironic that we, as a society, spend top dollar for where we live. In fact, our financial crisis has been caused because we do not always live within our means. But when it comes to dying, more and more people want to enter into eternity as cheaply as they can. Human life and human death reveal the true dignity of our lives. Human dignity should be the measure of how we live and how we die. And human dignity is never cheap.

If you are considering cremation, and would like to talk with me about that option, I will be glad to visit with you.

In joyful hope,
Fr. Tim Seigel