



Transitioning into Eternal Life

ANSWER KEY

1. Are Catholic allowed to be cremated?

Yes No

Throughout the centuries, the Church has followed the practice of burial or entombment after the manner of Christ's own burial. This expresses respect for the human body as a member of Christ, and faith in the resurrection of the body. However, for over 40 years now the Catholic Church has accepted cremation as well, provided that the cremated remains are treated with reverence and respect.

2. It looks so classy and romanticized in the movies – are the ashes allowed to be scattered in real life?

Yes No

No! Because of the Christian concept of the dignity of the human body, cremated remains are never to be scattered. These are human remains that deserve to be treated with greater dignity than being simply strewn about. Cremains, though in ash form, are still what remain of the body. We should no more scatter them than we would scatter body parts about. Placed in a worthy container, they should be buried in a grave or inurned in a columbarium niche, preferably in a Catholic cemetery.

3. Why do you think the funeral has to involve a mass?

The Mass, the memorial of Christ's death and resurrection, is the principal celebration of the Christian funeral. This is because the community turns for spiritual nourishment to the table of the Eucharist: "In partaking of the body of Christ, all are given a foretaste of eternal life in Christ and are united with Christ, with each other, and with all the faithful, living and dead."¹

4. What do you think is the point of a prayer vigil the night before?

In the prayer vigil service (also known as "the wake"), those who have been affected by the life of the deceased gather to pray for him or her. This is usually the first time since death when those related to the deceased gather together, and it allows them a time to be with the deceased before the final rite of committal. It is a time to gather together, read and reflect on Scripture, pray, share condolences, remember and celebrate the death of the loved one or friend. This is the appropriate time for a eulogy.

5. Why do you think the body of the deceased is displayed at the funeral? Isn't that kind of morbid?

¹ *Order of Christian Funerals*, 143.

Sometimes when the casket is closed, disbelief in the actuality of the death, and even fantasies, can develop. It can be important for you to view the body to allow you to come to terms with the reality of the death.² This is a necessary step in a healthy grieving process.

6. Why do you think they cover the casket with a cloth?

At a funeral Mass, the casket is received at the church, sprinkled with holy water, and covered with a white cloth. These signs recall **baptism**, the sacrament that brought the deceased into a relationship with the Christian community.

7. How do you think a Catholic cemetery is different than other cemeteries?

Catholic cemetery grounds have been blessed and consecrated by a Bishop, and there are safeguards in place that guarantee permanence, reverence and respect for the remains of the deceased. Locally, they are owned and operated by the Archdiocese of Vancouver, and as such are an extension of parish life.

² Catholic News Service: *The Wake And The Vigil Service: A Time To Share The Reality Of Life And Death*, by Dianne L. Josephson