

Church prefers interment, but cremation is permitted

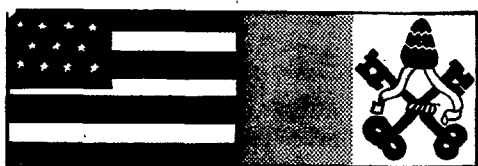
By Father Paul Cuddy
Courier columnist

The following question was asked during a recent day of recollection for Legionnaires of Mary at High Acres in Geneva.

Q: "May Catholics be cremated, and, if so, can her ashes be strewn over the waters? Does she have a Catholic Mass for the dead ahead of being cremated, and how is it handled?"

A: Burial has been the custom of the church for centuries. In the mid-19th century, European Free-Masons, who were extremely anti-Catholic, pushed for cremation. Why? Out of contempt for the Catholic doctrine of the resurrection of the body.

Rome put its hackles up and decreed that any Catholic who would arrange for cremation would be denied Christian burial.



ON THE RIGHT SIDE

Times do change, however, and the doctrine of the resurrection of the dead is no longer an issue. The latest Canon Law reads: "The Church earnestly recommends the pious custom of burying the bodies be observed. It does not, however, forbid cremation, unless it has been chosen for reasons which are contrary to Catholic teaching." (Canon 1173).

Some people abhor the idea of crema-

tion. Others find it a practical solution to neatly do away with the mortal remains. This has become common especially in cases where the body has to be transported a long distance, e.g. Florida, California or Europe. To transport a body is costly. It is less expensive to send the ashes long distances.

When Church of the Assumption in Fairport was under construction in 1983, the inventive Father John P. Norris, pastor, had a columbarium for cinerary urns built as part of the edifice. Each slot holds two urns and costs \$1,000. This includes perpetual care.

After the cremation has taken place, the state has no authority over the ashes. In addition, the family may have them interred in the cemetery or a garden or placed

on a mantle in the living room. One may have a wake, bring the body to the church for the Mass of Christian Burial and then send the body to the crematorium afterward. Or one may have the cremation first and the Mass afterward, with or without the urn present.

Undertakers may not be enthusiastic about this service since the sale of a casket is part of their livelihood. Many years ago Jessica Medford wrote a biting attack on the undertaking profession. The attack was taken up nationwide by editors, clergy and many people through letters to the editor.

The only person who wrote on behalf of the undertakers was the Jesuit Father Daniel Lord. In a column syndicated for Catholic newspapers, he wrote of the kindness and help of the family undertaker at the death of his mother. He told of the consolation he felt at seeing his mother, whose face had become so distorted before she died, now composed and peaceful.

My youngest brother was an undertaker for years and I saw first hand the sincere sympathy he had for the families of the deceased. He provided many services as part of a funeral, including the arrangements for the wake; the selection of a casket within the means of the people; the technicalities unrealized by most survivors relative to insurance; Veteran's benefits; and civil assistance. A good family undertaker is a friend at a time when friendship and expertise is very much needed.

To sum up my reply to the question about cremation. A Catholic may be cremated, a Mass of Christian Burial may be celebrated before or after the cremation, and a wake may be held if desired.

Covenant calls us to love others as God loves us

By Father Albert Shamon
Courier columnist

Sunday's Readings (R3) Mark 14:12-16, 22-28; (R1) Exodus 24:3-8; (R2) Hebrews 9:11-15.

Next Sunday is the solemnity of Corpus Christi. This feast owes its origins to St. Juliana, an Augustinian sister of Mt. Cornillon near Liege, Belgium.

When Juliana was 16-years-old, she had a vision of a bright moon streaked with a dark band. One night Our Lord explained to her that the moon was the church year, with its cycle of feasts, and that the black band denoted the absence of one holy day to complete the cycle: a feast in honor of the Blessed Sacrament.

In 1225, Juliana launched a campaign to get the feast instituted. Her efforts only got her incredible sufferings and hardships. She died in poverty and sickness in 1258. Six years later, her bishop, Pope Urban IV, instituted the Feast of Corpus Christi.

Throughout the three readings for the feast, two words appear: covenant and blood.

A covenant is an agreement between two parties. When the parties are equal, the agreement is called a "contract." When one party is superior to the other, the agreement is called a "covenant."

Today, we generally shake hands when we come to an agreement. In old times, agreements were sealed by blood. The word "covenant" means "to cut in two." To seal a pact in the old days, animals were



A WORD FOR SUNDAY

cut in two, and the contracting parties walked between the halves as if to say, "If I break my agreement, you can cut me to pieces."

In Genesis 15, God's covenant with Abraham was sealed that way. After Abraham walked between the halves, the meat was roasted and everybody joined in the banquet.

The blood from the slain animals was put into a bowl. Half of it was sprinkled on the altar, symbolizing God; and the other half, was sprinkled on the people. This sprinkling of the blood symbolized that the covenant established a blood relationship between the parties involved, even deeper than that of blood brothers (R1).

In the New Testament, the blood used to seal the covenant was not that of animals, but that of the Son of God on Calvary. That is why the author of Hebrews states that the new covenant is infinitely superior to the old covenant (R2).

The old covenant made the Hebrews God's chosen people, dearer to himself than a bride to her husband. The terms of the covenant was for God's people to keep his law — the Ten Commandments. God, on his part, promised to dwell among

them. The second half of the Book of Exodus describes what God's dwelling place among his people was to be like.

The new covenant has made it possible for all mankind to become children of God. The terms of the covenant is that God's children love one another as God has loved us. God, on his part, promised to give us the spirit of love and the sacrament of love, Corpus Christi, to enable us to fulfill our part of the covenant.

We were created by love and made for love. Jesus said to the crowds, "Love one another as yourself." Jesus said to his children, "Love one another as I have loved you." And how did Jesus love us? Unconditionally!

Too often we think human love needs human meriting. God loved us even when we did not deserve to be loved. He lets his rain fall on the good and bad alike. He allows his sun to shine on the just and the unjust.

So shouldn't we love all people, regardless of how they act toward us?

Graduation '91

To recognize the achievements of seniors at both public and Catholic high schools throughout the Diocese of Rochester, the *Catholic Courier* will present a special **Graduation '91** supplement in its issue of **June 13**.

This annual section includes feature articles, listings of graduating seniors, information on commencement exercises, and photographs of class valedictorians and salutatorians.

Parishes throughout the diocese are being asked to submit lists of parishioners who are graduating from public high schools. Parents who wish to have their sons and daughters included in these parish lists should contact their pastors or religious-education coordinator as soon as possible. We cannot accept any names over the telephone.

This annual supplement has long been among our most popular, and local companies and organizations should find it an ideal opportunity to promote their enterprises while applauding the scholastic efforts of diocesan youths.

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