

May Catholics be cremated?

Q. My aunt died recently at the age of 92. Her son, in charge of funeral arrangements, had his mother cremated after the funeral Mass and buried her ashes in the cemetery near her family.

Shortly afterward, the same was done for a deceased friend. Another friend told me that it is a serious sin for a Catholic to be cremated. What does the church or the Bible say about cremation? (New York)

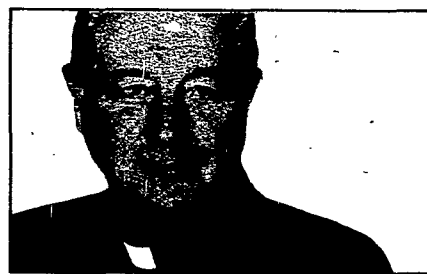
A. At one period during the past few hundred years, certain anti-Christian groups promoted cremation as a way of rejecting belief in the resurrection. The Catholic Church, and other Christians, prohibited it for that reason. It's been a long time, however, since that argument was raised, so cremation is no longer forbidden.

Traditional burial is still preferred, but economic, family or other factors sometimes make cremation an understandably practical choice. At present, more than one-fifth of American Catholics choose cremation, and the church's funeral ritual explicitly provides ceremonies for those who have been or will be cremated.

As in the funerals you describe, the body of the deceased person should, if possible, be present for all funeral liturgies — vigil service, Mass and prayers of commendation after Mass.

In this circumstance, cremation takes place later, and the ashes are buried in a cemetery or mausoleum. Ashes should not be scattered over water or land, or kept in one's house or closet, as some people apparently have done. In other words, cremated remains should be treated with the same dignity given to the deceased body.

Inhumation (traditional burial) was almost universal in ancient Jewish Near East culture, so there would be no reason for cremation to be discussed in the Bible. Not to be buried was considered such a great curse that even executed criminals re-



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Bridging Gaps

ceived a decent burial.

Finally, it is good to be reminded that individuals considering cremation should carefully and thoroughly discuss their plans with their family. Many people still find accompanying the body to the grave, and later visiting the site of the burial, a significant part of grieving.

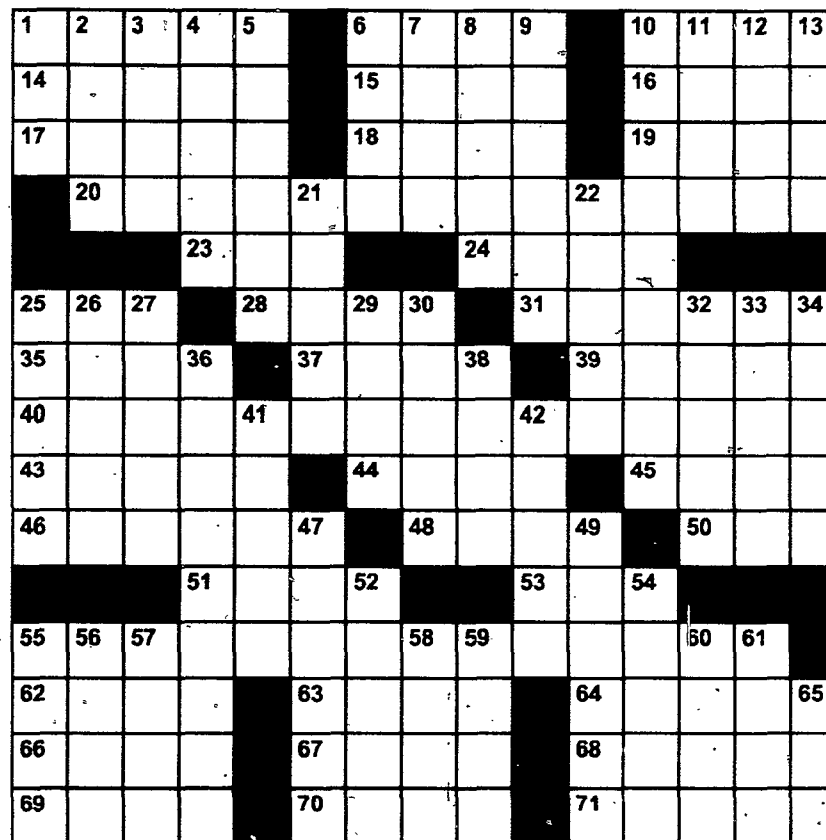
Thus, especially when children are involved, parents, grandparents and others should explain what will happen and be certain the children are psychologically and spiritually prepared.

Q. As a member of the hospital ministry of our parish, a patient asked me why the pope wears a skullcap. One of the priests said it goes back to ancient days. Should I just say it is to keep his head warm? (New Jersey)

A. The zucchetto ("skullcap") worn by the pope is the remnant of a larger cap formerly worn under the miter, the large pointed headdress worn by bishops, abbots and some others. The cap was to protect the miter, which was usually of more precious cloth.

The zucchetto now is too small for that purpose but, like many ecclesiastical vestments which once had a practical purpose, it remains part of liturgical ceremonial dress.

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Catholic Crossword

ACROSS

- 1 The Law
- 6 Christian media co.
- 10 Peter or Nicholas
- 14 Uneven
- 15 Cafe au ____
- 16 ____-Whip
- 17 Reduce
- 18 Forearm bone
- 19 Frequent opener for Jesus' sayings
- 20 Genesis genesis
- 23 Actor Mineo
- 24 Spanish metals
- 25 Samson killed Philistines with the jawbone of this animal
- 28 Type of mute
- 31 Aromas
- 35 "Then will the lame leap like a ____" (Is 35:6)
- 37 Fiddling Christian persecutor
- 39 Sneak ____
- 40 The Bible
- 43 Wrongdoer?
- 44 Sesame plant
- 45 Hook's first mate
- 46 ____ Sympathy
- 48 Medieval magistrate
- 50 Time zone
- 51 "Your new moons and festivals I detest; I ____ of the load." (Is 1:14)
- 53 Tiny
- 55 Exodus exodus
- 62 Sci. of flight
- 63 "Do not take the Lord's

DOWN

- 1 name in ____
- 6 Verbal expression
- 66 Enlist again
- 67 Laborer
- 68 Mythological east wind
- 69 Warehouse abbreviation
- 70 A camera has one
- 71 The Israelites crossed a sea of ____
- 1 Hot or Iced
- 2 Urbi et ____
- 3 Horse color
- 4 Helpers (abbr)
- 5 Television comedy show
- 6 High priest Jason wanted to build one of these for youth in Jerusalem (2 Mc 4:9)
- 7 "Inspid food is the untimely ____" (Sir 20:18)
- 8 What's going on in the school cafeteria on Friday nights?
- 9 Steps
- 10 Church architectural elements
- 11 Truck
- 12 Gulf
- 13 One of the things the father gave to the

- 21 Antelope
- 22 Not a limit
- 25 Positive quality
- 26 Gaze intently
- 27 Mental starter
- 29 Direction from the Dead Sea to Bethlehem
- 30 Curved
- 32 Musical term
- 33 Figured weight
- 34 Trapshooting
- 36 "the ____ to which he has called you" (Eph 1:18)
- 38 Cookie
- 41 A Ford
- 42 Clothing makers org
- 47 Nonsense
- 49 Weirder
- 52 "and I will never ____ his name from the book of life" (Rev 3:5)
- 54 Invest, as with a bishop's power
- 55 Paddles
- 56 What Jesus washed for his Apostles on Holy Thursday
- 57 Basket
- 58 Genie's counterpart
- 59 Easy to count by
- 60 Isle of St. Patrick
- 61 Pronoun contraction
- 65 Texts (abbr)

Answers on page 12 (No. 30)

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