

The 2016 Instruction from the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith *Ad resurgendum cum Christo* “Regarding the Burial of the Deceased and the Conservation of the Ashes in the Case of Cremation” addresses cremation but does not address the question of burial at sea. Canon law does not object to burial at sea, as long as the ashes are not scattered. Some points to note:

- United States federal regulations require burial at sea to take place at least **3 nautical miles off shore**. So it is required to go out into the ocean on a boat or ship in order to inter someone at sea. Consequently, scattering ashes on the water from shore violates both canon law and federal requirements.
- The 3 mile rule applies to both cremation and full body burial, and a report after the fact must be filed with the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). (Full body burial carries with it additional EPA requirements, such as regarding ocean depth and weighing down the casket. Go to the EPA’s web site or consult an environmental attorney for more information.)
- The EPA has strict requirements about what may be dropped into the ocean. After cremation, ashes are usually put into a plastic bag, so the ashes must be transferred out of the plastic bag into a biodegradable container. Biodegradable urns are available for purchase for as little as \$50. The Catholic Church has no objection to ashes being dropped into the ocean in a biodegradable urn.