I received a few questions about “burial at sea.”  Canon law does not object to burial at sea.  Some comments:

\*      Federal law requires burial at sea to take place at least 3 miles off shore.  So you must go out into the ocean on a boat/ship in order to inter someone at sea.  Consequently, scattering ashes on the water from shore violates both canon law and United States federal law.

\*      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, weighing down the casket, etc.)

\*      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.

As we pray for the souls in purgatory in the month of November and see the Jubilee Year of Mercy come to a close, perhaps it a good time to teach our people about the dignity of the human body, fitting Catholic funeral practices (see attachment), and the corporal work of mercy of burying the dead.

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