



The Holy See

HOLY MASS FOR THE SOULS OF ALL CARDINALS AND BISHOPS
WHO DIED DURING THE PAST YEARS

HOMILY OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI

Vatican Basilica

Saturday, 4 November 2006

*Your Eminences,
Venerable Brothers in the Episcopate,
Dear Brothers and Sisters,*

In the past few days the Solemnity of All Saints and the Commemoration of All Souls have helped us to meditate on the final destination of our earthly pilgrimage. In this spiritual atmosphere, we have gathered round the altar of the Lord today to celebrate Holy Mass for the repose of the souls of the Cardinals and Bishops whom God has called to himself during the past year.

We see their familiar faces once again as we listen to the names of the late lamented Cardinals who have departed from us in these past 12 months: Leo Scheffczyk, Pio Taofinu'u, Raúl Francisco Primatesta, Angel Suquía Goicoechea, Johannes Willebrands, Louis-Albert Vachon, Dino Monduzzi and Mario Francesco Pompedda. I would also like to name each one of the Archbishops and Bishops, but let the consoling certainty suffice for us that their names "are written in Heaven", as Jesus once said to the Apostles (Lk 10: 20).

Remembering the names of these brothers of ours in the faith refers us to the Sacrament of Baptism which marked, for each one of them as for every Christian, entry into the Communion of the Saints.

At the end of life, death deprives us of all that is earthly, but not of that Grace and that sacramental "character" by virtue of which we are indissolubly associated with Our Lord and Saviour's Paschal

Mystery. Emptied of all but clothed in Christ: thus do the baptized cross the threshold of death and are presented to the just and merciful God.

In order that the white garment received in Baptism may be purified of every speck and every stain, the Community of believers offers the Eucharistic Sacrifice and other prayers of suffrage for those whom death has called to pass from time to eternity.

Praying for the dead is a noble practice that implies belief in the resurrection of the dead, in accordance with what has been revealed to us by Sacred Scripture and, in a complete way, by the Gospel.

We have just heard the account of Ezekiel's vision of the dry bones (37: 1-14). This is certainly one of the most important and impressive biblical passages which lends itself to a twofold interpretation.

From the historical viewpoint, it responds to the need for hope by the Israelites deported to Babylon, distressed and afflicted at having to bury their dead in a foreign land.

The Lord announces to them through the mouth of the prophet that he will rescue them from that nightmare and enable them to return to the land of Israel. The evocative image of the bones that come to life and come together thus represents this people, who regains vigour and hope in order to return to their homeland.

However, Ezekiel's long and eloquent oracle, which exalts the power of the Word of God to whom nothing is impossible, at the same time marks a decisive step ahead towards faith in the resurrection of the dead. This faith was to be fulfilled in the New Testament.

In the light of Christ's Paschal Mystery, the vision of the dry bones acquires the value of a universal parable on the human race, a pilgrim in earthly exile subjected to the yoke of death.

The divine Word, incarnate in Jesus, comes to dwell in the world, many aspects of which make it a desolate valley; he shows full solidarity with human beings and brings them the glad tidings of eternal life. This announcement of hope is proclaimed to the depths of the afterworld, while the way that leads to the Promised Land is opened once and for all.

In the Gospel passage, we listened once again to the first verses of Jesus' great prayer cited in Chapter 17 of John. The Lord's sorrowful words show that the ultimate purpose of the entire "work" of the Son of God Incarnate consisted in giving eternal life to men and women (Jn 17: 2). Jesus also told us what eternal life consists in: "that they know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent" (Jn 17: 3).

In these words one can hear the praying voice of the Ecclesial Community, aware that the revelation of the "Name" of God received from the Lord is equivalent to the gift of eternal life. Knowing Jesus means knowing the Father; and knowing the Father means entering into real communion with the very Origin of Life, Light and Love.

Dear brothers and sisters, today we are thanking God in a special way for having made his Name known to these Cardinals and Bishops who have departed from us. They belong, according to the words of John's Gospel, to the ranks of those whom the Father entrusted to the Son "out of the world" (Jn 17: 6).

To each one of them Christ "gave the words" of the Father, and they "received them" and they have "believed"; they have placed their trust in the Father and in the Son (cf. Jn 17: 8).

It was for them that he prayed (cf. Jn 17: 9), entrusting them to the Father (cf. Jn 17: 15, 17, 20-21), saying in particular, "Father, I desire that they also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to behold my glory" (Jn 17: 24).

We intend our prayers of suffrage today to be united with this prayer of the Lord which is priestly *par excellence*. Christ substantiated his entreaty to the Father with the gift of himself on the Cross; let us offer our prayers in union with the Eucharistic Sacrifice, which is the real and actual representation of that unique and saving self-emptying.

Dear brothers and sisters, the venerable deceased Cardinals and Bishops whom we are commemorating this morning lived in this faith. Each one of them was called in the Church to feel as if the Apostle Paul's words, just now proclaimed in the second reading, were his own and to strive to put them into practice: "to me to live is Christ" (Phil 1: 21).

This vocation, received in Baptism, was reinforced in them with the Sacrament of Confirmation and with the three degrees of Sacred Orders, and was constantly nourished by participation in the Eucharist.

Through this sacramental process, their "being in Christ" grew steadily stronger and deeper, so that dying was no longer a loss - since they had already evangelically "lost" all things for the Lord and for the Gospel (cf. Mk 8: 35) - but a gain: that of encountering Jesus at last, and with him, finding fullness of life.

Let us ask the Lord to obtain for these beloved Brothers of ours, the deceased Cardinals and Bishops, that they may reach the destination they so deeply desired. Let us ask this relying on the intercession of Mary Most Holy and on the prayers of the many people who knew them in their lives and appreciated their Christian virtues.

Let us gather together in this Holy Eucharist every thanksgiving and every supplication, for the benefit of their souls and of the souls of all the deceased, whom we commend to the divine mercy.

Amen.

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