



The Holy See

MASS FOR DECEASED CARDINALS AND BISHOPS OF THE PAST YEAR

HOMILY OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI

Saint Peter's Basilica

11 November 2005

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

The month of November draws its special spiritual tone from the two days with which it opens: the Solemnity of All Saints and the Commemoration of all the faithful departed. The mystery of the communion of saints illumines this month and the whole of the last part of the liturgical year in particular, directing our meditation to the earthly destiny of man in the light of Christ's Pasch. In it is founded that hope which, as St Paul said, is such that it "will not leave us disappointed" (cf. Rom 5: 5). Today's celebration fits into this very context in which faith sublimates sentiments deeply engraved into the human soul.

The great family of the Church finds in these days a time of grace and lives them, in accordance with her vocation, gathered closely around the Lord in prayer and offering his redeeming Sacrifice for the repose of the deceased faithful. Today, we offer it especially for the Cardinals and Bishops who have departed from us in this past year.

For a long time I was a member of the College of Cardinals, of which I was Dean for two and a half years. I therefore feel particularly attached to this special community over which I also had the honour to preside during the unforgettable days that followed the departure of the beloved Pope John Paul II.

Among the other shining examples he left us, his most precious is that of prayer, and at this time

we are also piecing together his spiritual heritage, aware that his intercession continues even more intensely from Heaven.

In the past 12 months, five venerable Brother Cardinals have passed to "the other bank": Juan Carlos Aramburu, Jan Pieter Schotte, Corrado Bafile, Jaime Sin and, less than a month ago, Giuseppe Caprio. Today, together with their souls, let us entrust to the Lord the souls of the Archbishops and Bishops who have ended their earthly lives in the same period. Together, let us raise our prayers for each one of them, in the light of God's words to us in this Liturgy.

The passage from the Book of Sirach contains first of all an exhortation to constancy in trial, hence, an invitation to trust in God. To men and women who are passing through the vicissitudes of life, Wisdom recommends: "Cling to him [the Lord], forsake him not; thus will your future be great" (*Sir 2: 3*).

Those who place themselves at the Lord's service and spend their lives in the ecclesial ministry are not exempt from trials; on the contrary, the trials are even more insidious, as the experience of the saints shows.

However, living in fear of God sets the heart free from any fear and immerses it into the abyss of his love. "You who fear the Lord, trust him... hope for good things, for lasting joy and mercy" (*Sir 2: 8-9*).

This invitation to trust is directly linked to the beginning of the passage of John's Gospel just proclaimed: "Do not let your hearts be troubled", Jesus said to the Apostles at the Last Supper. "Have faith in God and have faith also in me" (*Jn 14: 1*). The human heart, ever restless until it finds a safe landing place in its wanderings, here at last reaches the solid rock where it can stop and rest.

Those who trust in Jesus place their trust in God himself. In fact, Jesus is true Man, but we can have complete and unconditional faith in him because, as he himself said to Philip a little later, he is in the Father and the Father is in him (cf. *Jn 14: 10*). In this, God truly came to meet our needs.

We human beings need a friend, a brother who takes us by the hand and accompanies us to the "Father's house" (*Jn 14: 2*); we need someone who knows the way well. And God, with his "super-abundant" love for us (cf. *Eph 2: 4*), sent his Son not only to point it out to us but to become himself "the way" (*Jn 14: 6*).

"No one comes to the Father but through me" (*Jn 14: 6*), Jesus says. That "no one" admits no exceptions: indeed, it matches another word that Jesus also said at the Last Supper when, offering the cup, he said: "This is my blood, the blood of the covenant, to be poured out on behalf of many for the forgiveness of sins" (*Mt 26: 28*).

There are also "many places" in the Father's house, in the sense that with God there is room for "all" (cf. *Jn* 14: 2). Jesus is the way open to "all"; there are no others. And what seem to be "other" ways, lead to him if they are authentic, or else they do not lead to life. Therefore, in sending his Only-begotten Son, the Father offered humanity a gift that is priceless.

This gift implies a responsibility which is all the greater, the closer the relationship with Jesus is that derives from it. "When much has been given a man", the Lord says, "much will be required of him. More will be asked of a man to whom more has been entrusted" (*Lk* 12: 48).

For this reason, while we thank God for all the benefits that he has bestowed upon our deceased Brothers, let us offer for them the merits of the passion and death of Christ, so that they may fill the gaps due to human frailty.

The Responsorial Psalm (122[121]) and the second reading (I *Jn* 3: 1-2) enlarge our hearts with the wonder of hope to which we have been called. The Psalmist makes us sing this Psalm as a hymn to Jerusalem, asking us to imitate in spirit the pilgrims who "go up" to the Holy City and after a long climb, arrive full of joy at its gates: "I rejoiced because they said to me, 'We will go up to the house of the Lord'. And now we have set foot within your gates, O Jerusalem" (*Ps* 122[121]: 1-2).

The Apostle John, in his First Letter, expresses this joy, communicating to us the certainty, full of gratitude, that we have become children of God and at the same time, the expectation of the full manifestation of this reality: "We are God's children now; what we shall later be has not yet come to light... when it comes to light we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is" (I *Jn* 3: 2).

Venerable and dear Brothers, with our minds turned to this mystery of salvation, let us offer the divine Eucharist for the Cardinals and Prelates who have recently preceded us in the last journey, to eternal life. Let us invoke the intercession of St Peter and of the Blessed Virgin Mary in order that they welcome them to the Father's house, in the trusting hope that we will one day be able to join them, to enjoy the fullness of life and peace. Amen.