



The Holy See

BENEDICT XVI

GENERAL AUDIENCE

*Paul VI Audience Hall
Wednesday, 2 November 2011*

[\[Video\]](#)

Commemoration of All the Faithful Departed

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

After celebrating the Solemnity of All Saints, today the Church invites us to commemorate all the faithful departed, to turn our eyes to the many faces who have gone before us and who have ended their earthly journey. So at today's Audience, I would like to offer a few simple thoughts on the reality of death, which for us Christians is illuminated by the Resurrection of Christ, and so as to renew our faith in eternal life.

As I already said at the [Angelus](#) yesterday, during these days we go to the cemetery to pray for the loved ones who have left us, as it were paying a visit to show them, once more, our love, to feel them still close, remembering also, an article of the *Creed*: in the communion of saints there is a close bond between us who are still walking here upon the earth and those many brothers and sisters who have already entered eternity.

Human beings have always cared for their dead and sought to give them a sort of second life through attention, care and affection. In a way, we want to preserve their experience of life; and, paradoxically, by looking at their graves, before which countless memories return, we discover how they lived, what they loved, what they feared, what they hoped for and what they hated. They are almost a mirror of their world.

Why is this so? Because, despite the fact that death is an almost forbidden subject in our society and that there is a continuous attempt to banish the thought of it from our minds, death touches each of us, it touches mankind of every age and every place. And before this mystery we all, even unconsciously, search for something to give us hope, a sign that might bring us consolation, open up some horizon, offer us a future once more. The road to death, in reality, is a way of hope and it passes through our cemeteries, just as can be read on the tombstones and fulfills a journey marked by the hope of eternity.

Yet, we wonder, why do we feel fear before death? Why has humanity, for the most part, never resigned itself to the belief that beyond life there is simply nothing? I would say that there are multiple answers: we are afraid of death because we are afraid of that nothingness, of leaving this world for something we don't know, something unknown to us. And, then, there is a sense of rejection in us because we cannot accept that all that is beautiful and great, realized during a lifetime, should be suddenly erased, should fall into the abyss of nothingness. Above all, we feel that love calls and asks for eternity and it is impossible to accept that it is destroyed by death in an instant.

Furthermore, we fear in the face of death because, when we find ourselves approaching the end of our lives, there is a perception that our actions will be judged, the way in which we have lived our lives, above all, those moments of darkness which we often skillfully remove or try to remove from our conscience. I would say that precisely the question of judgment often underlies man of all time's concern for the dead, the attention paid to the people who were important to him and are no longer with him on the journey through earthly life. In a certain sense the gestures of affection and love which surround the deceased are a way to protect him in the conviction that they will have an effect on the judgment. This we can gather from the majority of cultures that characterize the history of man.

Today the world has become, at least in appearance, much more rational, or rather, there is a more widespread tendency to think that every reality ought to be tackled with the criteria of experimental science, and that the great questions about death ought to be answered not so much with faith as with empirical, provable knowledge. It is not sufficiently taken into account, however, that precisely in this way one is doomed to fall into forms of spiritism, in an attempt to have some kind of contact with the world beyond, almost imagining it to be a reality that, ultimately, is a copy of the present one.

Dear friends, the Solemnity of All Saints and the Commemoration of all the faithful departed tells us that only those who can recognize a great hope in death, can live a life based on hope. If we reduce man exclusively to his horizontal dimension, to that which can be perceived empirically, life itself loses its profound meaning. Man needs eternity for every other hope is too brief, too limited for him. Man can be explained only if there is a Love which overcomes every isolation, even that of death, in a totality which also transcends time and space. Man can be explained, he finds his

deepest meaning, only if there is God. And we know that God left his distance for us and made himself close. He entered into our life and tells us: "I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and whoever lives and believes in me shall never die" (Jn 11:25-26).

Let us think for a moment of the scene on Calvary and listen again to Jesus' words from the height of the Cross, addressed to the criminal crucified on his right: "Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise" (Lk 23:43). We think of the two disciples on the road to Emmaus, when, after traveling a stretch of the way with the Risen Jesus, they recognize him and set out immediately for Jerusalem to proclaim the Resurrection of the Lord (cf. Lk 24:13-35). The Master's words come back to our minds with renewed clarity: "Let not your hearts be troubled; believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you?" (Jn 14:1-2). God is truly demonstrated, he became accessible, for he so loved the world "that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life" (Jn 3:16), and in the supreme act of love on the Cross, immersing himself in the abyss of death, he conquered it, and rose and opened the doors of eternity for us too. Christ sustains us through the night of death which he himself overcame; he is the Good Shepherd, on whose guidance one can rely without any fear, for he knows the way well, even through darkness.

Every Sunday in reciting the *Creed*, we reaffirm this truth. And in going to cemeteries to pray with affection and love for our departed, we are invited, once more, to renew with courage and with strength our faith in eternal life, indeed to live with this great hope and to bear witness to it in the world: behind the present there is not nothing. And faith in eternal life gives to Christians the courage to love our earth ever more intensely and to work in order to build a future for it, to give it a true and sure hope. Thank you.

To Special Groups:

I offer a warm welcome to the priests from the United States taking part in the Institute for Continuing Theological Education at the Pontifical North American College in Rome. My greeting also goes to the pilgrimage group from Saint Paul's High School in Tokyo, Japan. Upon all the English-speaking visitors present at today's Audience, especially those from Ireland, Denmark, Norway, Japan and the United States, I invoke God's blessings of joy and peace!

Lastly, I wish to greet the *young people*, the *sick* and the *newlyweds*. The day after tomorrow is the liturgical memorial of St Charles Borromeo, an outstanding Bishop of the Diocese of Milan, who, inspired by ardent love for Christ, was a tireless teacher and guide of his brothers. May his example help you, dear *young people*, to be led by Christ in your decision to follow him without fear; may it encourage you, dear *sick people*, to offer up your suffering for the Pastors of the Church and for the salvation of souls; may it support you, dear *newlyweds*, in your generous

service to life.

Appeal:

At the end of the General Audience on 2 November, the Holy Father made the following Appeal:

This 3 and 4 November — tomorrow and the day after — Heads of State or of the Government of G20 will meet in Cannes to look at principal problems concerning the global economy. I hope that the meeting helps overcome the difficulties which hinder the promotion of an authentically human and integral development worldwide.

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