



The Holy See

HOLY MASS ON THE SECOND ANNIVERSARY OF THE DEATH
OF THE SERVANT OF GOD, THE SUPREME PONTIFF JOHN PAUL II

HOMILY OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI

St Peter's Square

Monday, 2 April 2007

*Venerable Brothers in the Episcopate and in the Priesthood,
Dear Brothers and Sisters,*

Two years ago, at a slightly later hour than now, beloved [Pope John Paul II](#) departed this world for the house of the Father.

With this celebration, let us first of all renew our thanksgiving to God for having given him to us for well near 27 years as a father and reliable guide in the faith, a zealous Pastor and courageous prophet of hope, a tireless witness and passionate servant of God's love.

As we offer the Eucharistic Sacrifice in suffrage for his chosen soul we remember the unforgettable devotion with which he celebrated the Holy Mysteries and adored the Sacrament of the Altar, the centre of his life and of his untiring mission.

I want to express my gratitude to all of you who have wished to take part in this Holy Mass. I address a particular greeting to Cardinal Stanislaw Dziwisz, Archbishop of Krakow, imagining the sentiments that must be filling his heart at this moment.

I greet the other Cardinals, Bishops, priests and men and women Religious present; the pilgrims who have come here expressly from Poland; all the young people whom Pope John Paul II loved with a unique passion and the many members of the faithful from every part of Italy and the world who have gathered here in St Peter's Square for today's appointment.

The second anniversary of the departure of this beloved Pontiff is taking place in a particularly

favourable context for recollection and prayer.

Yesterday, in fact, with Palm Sunday we entered Holy Week and the Liturgy makes us relive the last days of the Lord Jesus' earthly life.

Today, it takes us to Bethany, where, precisely "six days before the Passover", as the Evangelist John notes, Lazarus, Martha and Mary asked the Teacher to supper.

The Gospel account impresses an intense paschal atmosphere on our meditation: the supper at Bethany is a prelude to Jesus' death in the sign of his anointing by Mary, a homage she pays to the Teacher which he accepts as foretelling his burial (cf. *Jn 12: 7*).

However, it is also an announcement of the Resurrection through the very presence of Lazarus restored to life, an eloquent witness of Christ's power over death.

Not only pregnant with Paschal significance, the narrative of the supper at Bethany is imbued with an anguishing resonance filled with love and devotion, a mist of joy and pain: festive joy at the visit of Jesus and his disciples, at the resurrection of Lazarus and at the Passover now at hand; deep sorrow because this Passover might be the last, as they were led to fear by the scheming of the Jews who desired the death of Jesus and by the threats to Lazarus whose death they were also planning.

One action in this Gospel passage is drawn to our attention, and which even now speaks to our hearts in a special way: Mary of Bethany, at a certain point, "took a pound of costly ointment of pure nard and anointed the feet of Jesus and wiped his feet with her hair" (*Jn 12: 3*). This is one of those details of Jesus' life which St John cherished among his dearest memories and which is charged with inexhaustible feeling.

He speaks of love for Christ, a superabundant, wondrous love like that "costly" ointment poured over his feet. This event symptomatically shocked Judas Iscariot: the logic of love clashed with the logic of profit.

For us, gathered in prayer in memory of my Venerable Predecessor, the gesture of the anointing of Mary of Bethany is full of spiritual echoes and suggestions. It evokes John Paul II's shining witness of love for Christ, unreserved and unstinting.

The "house", that is, the entire Church, "was filled with the "fragrance" of his love (cf. *Jn 12: 3*). Of course, we who were close to him benefited from it and are grateful to God, but even those who knew him from afar were able to enjoy it because Pope Wojty³a's love for Christ was so strong, so intense, we could say, that it overflowed in every region of the world.

Was not the esteem, respect and affection expressed to him at his death by believers and non-believers alike an eloquent witness of this?

St Augustine wrote, commenting on this passage of John's Gospel: "'The house was filled with the fragrance'. The world is filled with the fame of a good character: for a good character is like a sweet scent.... Through the good, the name of the Lord is honoured" (*In Io. Evang. tr. 50, 7*). This is really true; the intense and fruitful pastoral ministry and, even more, the calvary of the agony and serene death of our beloved Pope showed the people of our time that Jesus Christ was truly his "all".

The fruitfulness of this witness, as we know, depended on the Cross. In Karol Wojty³a's life, the word "cross" was not merely a word. From his childhood, he was familiar with suffering and death. As priest and Bishop and especially as Supreme Pontiff, he took most seriously the Risen Christ's last call to Simon Peter on the shore of the Lake of Galilee: "Follow me... Follow me!" (*Jn 21: 19, 22*).

His whole life, particularly with the slow but implacable advance of the disease which gradually stripped him of everything, became an offering to Christ, a living proclamation of his passion in hope brimming with faith in the resurrection.

He lived his Pontificate in the sign of "prodigality", generously spending himself without reserve. What motivated him other than mystical love for Christ, for the One who, on 16 October 1978, had him called with the ceremonial words: "*Magister adest et vocat te* - the Teacher is here and is calling you"?

On 2 April 2005, the Teacher called him again, this time without intermediaries, in order to take him home to the house of the Father. And once again he promptly responded with his brave heart in a whisper: "Let me go to the Lord" (cf. S. Dziwisz, *Una vita con Karol*, p. 223).

He had been preparing for a long time for this last encounter with Jesus, as the various drafts of his Testament reveal.

During the long periods he spent in his private chapel he spoke to Jesus, abandoning himself totally to his will, and entrusted himself to Mary, repeating the *Totus tuus*. Like his Divine Teacher, he lived his agony in prayer. On the last day of his life, on the eve of Divine Mercy Sunday, he asked that the Gospel of John be read to him.

With the help of those who were nursing him, he wanted to take part in all the daily prayers and in the Liturgy of the Hours, he wanted to do adoration and meditation. He died while he was praying. He truly fell asleep in the Lord.

"And the house was filled with the fragrance of the ointment" (*Jn* 12: 3).

Let us return to this most evocative annotation by the Evangelist John. The Pope's sweet scent of faith, hope and charity filled his house, filled St Peter's Square, filled the Church and spread throughout the world.

What happened after his death was for believers an effect of that "fragrance" which reached everyone near and far and attracted them to a man whom God had gradually conformed to his Christ.

For this reason, we can apply to him the words of the first Song of the Servant of the Lord which we heard in the First Reading: "Behold my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights; I have put my Spirit upon him, he will bring forth justice to the nations..." (*Is* 42: 1).

"Servant of God": this is what he was and this is what we in the Church call him now, while the process of his Beatification continues.

This morning, the diocesan investigation into his life, virtues and fame of sanctity was concluded. "Servant of God", a particularly appropriate title for him. The Lord called him to his service on the path of the priesthood and little by little unfolded before him ever broader horizons: from his own Diocese to the universal Church.

This dimension of universality reached its apex at the moment of his death, an event the whole world lived with a participation unprecedented in history.

Dear brothers and sisters, the Responsorial Psalm has placed words full of trust on our lips. In the Communion of Saints, we seem to hear them spoken aloud by our beloved John Paul II, who, from the Father's House, we are sure of it, never ceases to accompany the Church on her way: "Wait for the Lord; be strong, and let your heart take courage; yes, wait for the Lord!" (*Ps* 27[26]: 13-14). Yes, let your heart take courage, dear brothers and sisters, and burn with hope! With this invitation in our hearts let us continue the Eucharistic Celebration, already looking at the light of the Resurrection of Christ that will shine out in the Easter Vigil after the dramatic darkness of Good Friday.

May the Totus tuus of the beloved Pontiff encourage us to follow him on the path of the gift of ourselves to Christ through the intercession of Mary, and may she herself, the Virgin Mary, obtain it for us while we entrust to her motherly hands this father, brother and friend of ours, that he may rest in God and rejoice in peace. Amen.

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