



The Holy See

EUCCHARISTIC CONCELEBRATION
IN MEMORY OF THE CARDINALS AND BISHOPS
WHO DIED DURING THE PAST YEAR

HOMILY OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI

Vatican Basilica
Monday, 5 November 2007

Dear and Venerable Brothers,

After commemorating all the deceased faithful on their liturgical commemoration, we meet here in this Vatican Basilica in accordance with tradition to offer the Eucharistic Sacrifice in suffrage for the Cardinals and Bishops who, called by the Lord, departed from this world in the course of the year.

I remember with affection the names of the late Cardinals: Salvatore Pappalardo, Frédéric Etsou-Nzabi Bamungwabi, Antonio María Javierre, Angelo Felici, Jean-Marie Lustiger, Edouard Gagnon, Adam Koz³owiecki and Rosalio José Castillo Lara. I am thinking of the person and ministry of each one of them; although we are immersed in the sorrow of bereavement, let us raise our heartfelt thanks to God for the gift that he made to the Church in them, and for all the good which with his help they were able to achieve. Let us likewise entrust to the Eternal Father the deceased Patriarchs, Archbishops and Bishops, expressing our gratitude on behalf of the whole Catholic Community for them, too.

The Church's prayer of suffrage "relies", so to speak, on the prayer of Jesus himself which we heard in the Gospel passage: "Father, I desire that they also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am" (Jn 17: 24). Jesus was referring to his Disciples, and in particular to the Apostles who were with him at the Last Supper. But the Lord's prayer extends to all his disciples of all times. In fact, a little earlier he said: "I do not pray for these only, but also for those who believe in me through their word" (Jn 17: 20). And if he asked here that all might be "one... so that the

world may believe" (v. 21), we can also understand that he was asking the Father to be able to have with him, in the dwelling place of his eternal glory, all the disciples who died under the banner of faith.

"They... whom you gave me" (v. 24) is a beautiful definition of the Christian as such, but can obviously be applied specifically to those whom God the Father chose among the faithful to follow his Son more closely. In light of these words of the Lord, our thoughts at this time go in particular to the venerable Brothers for whom we are offering this Eucharist. They were men whom the Father "gave" to Christ. He removed them from the world, that "world" which "has not known" him (Jn 17: 25), and called them to become friends of Jesus. This was the most precious grace of their whole life. They were, of course, people with different characteristics, both because of their personal experiences and because of the ministry they exercised; but they all had in common the most important thing: friendship with the Lord Jesus. They received it as their lot on earth, as priests, and now, beyond death, they share in Heaven this "inheritance which is imperishable, undefiled and unfading" (I Pt 1: 4). During his earthly existence Jesus made God's Name known to them, admitting them to share in the love of the Most Holy Trinity. The Father's love for his Son had penetrated them, and likewise the very Person of the Son, by virtue of the Holy Spirit, dwelled in each one of them (cf. Jn 17: 26): an experience of divine communion which tends by its nature to fill the whole of life, to transfigure it and to prepare it for the glory of eternal life.

It is consoling and salutary, in praying for the deceased, to meditate upon Jesus' trust in his Father and thus to let oneself be enveloped by the serene light of this absolute abandonment of the Son to the will of his "*Abba*". Jesus knows that the Father is always with him (cf. Jn 8: 29); that together they are one (cf. 10: 30). He knows that his own death must be a "baptism", in other words, an "immersion" into God's love (cf. Lk 12: 50), and he goes to meet it, certain that the Father will bring about in him the ancient prophecy we heard today in the first biblical Reading: "After two days he will revive us; on the third day he will raise us up, that we may live before him" (Hos 6: 2). This oracle of the Prophet Hosea refers to the People of Israel and expresses trust in the Lord's help: a trust which, unfortunately, the people sometimes lacked through fickleness and superficiality, even going so far as to abuse the divine benevolence. Rather, in the Person of Jesus, love for God the Father becomes completely sincere, authentic and faithful. He took upon himself the entire reality of ancient Israel and brought it to completion. The "we" of the People is condensed in the "I" of Jesus, in his repeated announcement of the Passion, death and Resurrection, when he openly revealed to his disciples what awaited him in Jerusalem: he was to be rejected by the elders and chiefs, arrested, condemned to death and crucified, and would rise on the third day (cf. Mt 16: 21). Christ's unique trust is passed on to us through the gift of the Holy Spirit, to the Church in which we come to share through the Sacrament of Baptism. The "I" of Jesus becomes a new "we", the "we" of *his* Church, when he is communicated to those who are incorporated into him through Baptism. And this identification is reinforced in all who have been configured to him in Sacred Orders, through a special call from the Lord.

The Responsorial Psalm has put on our lips the acute longing of a Levite far from Jerusalem and the Temple, who desires to return there to stand once again before the Lord (cf. Ps 42[41]: 1-3). "My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When shall I come and behold the face of God?" (Ps 42[41]: 1-3). This thirst contains a truth that does not betray, a hope that does not disappoint. It is a thirst which even in the darkest night lights the way towards the source of life, as St John of the Cross so admirably expressed it. The Psalmist makes room for the laments of the soul but he sets in the heart and at the end of his wonderful hymn a refrain full of trust: "Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you disquieted within me? Hope in God, for I shall again praise him, the salvation of my face and my God" (cf. vv. 5-6). In the light of Christ and of his Paschal Mystery, these words reveal all their marvellous truth: not even death can make the believer's hope fruitless, because for our sake Christ entered the sanctuary of Heaven, and it is there that he desires to lead us, after having prepared a place for us (cf. Jn 14: 1-3).

Our beloved deceased Brothers recited this Psalm countless times with this faith and this hope. As priests they experienced its full existential resonance, taking upon themselves in addition the accusations and mockery of those who say to believers in their trial: "Where is your God?". Now, at the end of their earthly exile, they have reached the Homeland. Following that path their Risen Lord made accessible to them, they have not entered a Sanctuary made with hands but Heaven itself (cf. Heb 9: 24). There, together with the Blessed Virgin Mary and all the Saints, may they contemplate God's Face at last - this is our prayer - and sing his praises for ever and ever. Amen.

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