



The Holy See

MASS OF SUFFRAGE FOR ARCHBISHOP PAULOS FARAJ RAHHO

HOMILY OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI

Redemptoris Mater Chapel

Monday, 17 March 2008

Venerable and Dear Brothers,

We have entered [Holy Week](#) with great sorrow in our hearts because of the tragic death of beloved Archbishop Paulos Faraj Rahho, of Mossul for Chaldeans. I wanted to offer this Holy Mass in suffrage for him and I thank you for accepting my invitation to pray together for him. I feel that Cardinal Emmanuel III Delly, Patriarch of Babylon for Chaldeans, and the Bishops of this beloved Church that in Iraq suffers, believes and prays, are close to us at this moment. I send a special word of greeting and encouragement to these venerable Brothers in the episcopate, to their priests, Religious and all their faithful, trusting that in faith they may be able to find the strength not to lose heart in the difficult situation they are living.

The present liturgical context is the most eloquent possible: these are days in which we are reliving the last moments of Jesus' earthly life. They are dramatic hours, filled with love and fear especially in the souls of his disciples, hours in which a clearcut contrast was made between truth and falsehood, between the meekness and rectitude of Christ and the violence and deception of his enemies. Jesus experienced the approach of a violent death, he felt the net of his persecutors tightening around him. He experienced anguish and fear until the crucial hour in Gethsemane. But he lived it all immersed in communion with the Father and comforted by the "anointing" of the Holy Spirit.

Today's Gospel recalls the supper in Bethany, which, to the disciple John's deep gaze of faith, reveals profound meaning. Mary's gesture of anointing Jesus' feet with precious ointment becomes an extreme act of grateful love with a view to the Teacher's burial; and the fragrance that spread throughout the house is the symbol of his immense love, of the beauty and goodness of his

sacrifice which fills his Church. I am thinking of the sacred Chrism with which Archbishop Rahho's forehead was anointed at his Baptism and Confirmation; with which his hands were anointed on the day of his priestly Ordination, and then again, his head and hands when he was ordained a Bishop. But I am also thinking of the many other "anointings" of filial affection, of spiritual friendship, of the devotion reserved for him by his faithful and which accompanied him in the terrible hours of his kidnapping and distressing imprisonment - where he might have been injured previous to this -, to the point of agony and death, to the point of that unworthy burial where his mortal remains were subsequently discovered. But those anointings, sacramental and spiritual, were a pledge of resurrection, a pledge of the true, full life that the Lord Jesus came to give us!

The reading from the prophet Isaiah has set before us the figure of God's Servant in the first of the four "Songs" which stress the meekness and power of this mysterious envoy of God who was completely fulfilled in Jesus Christ. The Servant is presented as the one who "will bring forth justice", will proclaim righteousness, "will establish justice", with an insistence on this term that cannot pass unobserved. The Lord called him "for the victory of justice", and he will carry out this universal mission with the non-violent force of the truth. In Christ's Passion we see the fulfilment of this mission when, before an unjust sentence, he bears witness to the truth, remaining faithful to the law of love. On this same path, Archbishop Rahho took up his cross and followed the Lord, and thus contributed to bringing justice to his tormented country and to the entire world, bearing witness to the truth. He was a man of peace and dialogue. I know that he had a specially soft spot for the poor and the disabled, for whose physical and mental assistance he founded a special association called *Joy and Charity* ("Farah wa Mahabba"), to which he entrusted the task of appreciating these people and supporting their families, many of whom learned from him not to hide these relatives and to see Christ in them. May his example sustain all Iraqis of good will, Christians and Muslims, so that they can build a peaceful coexistence founded on human brotherhood and reciprocal respect.

In these days, in profound union with the Chaldean Community in Iraq and in the diaspora, we have mourned Archbishop Rahho's death and the inhuman way in which he was obliged to end his earthly life. Today however, in this Eucharist that we are offering for his consecrated soul, we would like to thank God for all the good he worked in him and through him, and at the same time our hope is that in Heaven he will intercede with the Lord to obtain for the faithful in that sorely-tried Country the courage to continue to work for a better future. Just as beloved Archbishop Paulos spared no energy at the service of his people, so may his Christians be able to persevere in the commitment to build a peaceful, supportive society on the path of progress and of peace. Let us entrust these wishes to the intercession of the Most Blessed Virgin, Mother of the Incarnate Word for the salvation of men and women, and hence, Mother of Hope for all.

Copyright © Dicastero per la Comunicazione - Libreria Editrice Vaticana