



# The Holy See

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## HOLY MASS ON THE THIRD ANNIVERSARY OF THE DEATH OF THE SERVANT OF GOD JOHN PAUL II

### *HOMILY OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI*

*St Peter's Square*

*Wednesday, 2 April 2008*

*Dear Brothers and Sisters,*

The date 2 April is impressed in the Church's memory as the day of the departure from this world of the Servant of God Pope John Paul II. Let us relive with emotion the hours of that Saturday evening when the news of his death was greeted by a great prayerful crowd that filled St Peter's Square to overflowing. For several days the Vatican Basilica and this Square were truly the heart of the world. A never-ending river of pilgrims paid homage to the body of the venerated Pontiff and his funeral was marked by a further testimony of the esteem and affection he had won in the hearts of multitudes of believers and people who had come from every corner of the earth. Today too, as it did three years ago, 2 April falls shortly after Easter. The heart of the Church is still deeply immersed in the mystery of the Lord's Resurrection. We can truly interpret the whole life of my beloved Predecessor, particularly his Petrine ministry, in the sign of the Risen Christ. He had an extraordinary faith in him and carried on an unusual and uninterrupted conversation with him. Indeed, among his many human and supernatural qualities he possessed exceptional spiritual and mystic sensibilities. It was enough to see him praying: he literally immersed himself in God and it seemed that in those moments everything else was foreign to him. At liturgical celebrations he was attentive to the mystery-in-action, showing an outstanding ability to grasp the eloquence of God's Word in the development of history, at the profound level of God's plan. As he often said, Holy Mass for him was the centre of every day, and every day of his life. The "living and holy" reality of the Eucharist gave him the spiritual energy to guide the People of God on their journey through history.

John Paul II passed away on the eve of the Second Sunday of Easter, at the end of the "day that the Lord has made". His agony took place throughout this "day", in the new space-time which is the "eighth day", desired by the Most Holy Trinity through the work of the Incarnate Word, dead and Risen. In this spiritual dimension Pope John Paul II often demonstrated that during his life he had in a certain way already been steeped in this spiritual dimension, both earlier and especially in the fulfilment of his mission as Supreme Pontiff. His Pontificate as a whole and in a multitude of specific moments appears to us as a sign and testimony of the Resurrection of Christ. The paschal dynamism that made John Paul II's life a total response to the Lord's call could not be expressed without participation in the suffering and death of the Divine Master and Redeemer. "The saying is sure", the Apostle Paul said: "If we have died with him, we shall also live with him; if we endure, we shall also reign with him" (II Tm 2: 11-12). Since his childhood Karol Wojtyła had experienced the truth of these words, encountering the cross on his way, in his family and among his people. It was not long before he decided to carry it with Jesus, following in his footsteps. He wanted to be Jesus' faithful servant to the point of accepting the call to the priesthood as a lifelong gift and commitment. He lived with him and wished to die with him, all through the unique mediation of Mary Most Holy, Mother of the Church and Mother of the Redeemer, intimately and effectively associated with the saving mystery of his death and Resurrection.

In this evocative reflection may we be guided by the biblical Readings just proclaimed: "Do not be afraid" (Mt 28: 5). The words we have just heard, which the Angel of the Resurrection addressed to the women by the empty tomb, had become a sort of motto that had been on Pope John Paul II's lips since the solemn beginning of his Petrine ministry. He often repeated them to the Church and to humanity on the way towards the Year 2000, and then through that historical goal and beyond, to the dawn of the third millennium. He always spoke them with unbending firmness, first brandishing his crosier crowned with a Crucifix and then, when his physical energy was ebbing away, almost clinging to it until that last Good Friday, when he took part in the Way of the Cross in his private Chapel, gripping the Cross tightly in his arms. We cannot forget his last and silent testimony of love for Jesus. That eloquent scene of human suffering and faith on that last Good Friday also showed believers and the world the secret of the entire Christian life. His "Do not be afraid" was not based on human strength or successes achieved but only on the Word of God, the Cross and the Resurrection of Christ. As John Paul II was gradually emptied of everything, at last even the ability to speak, this entrustment of himself to Christ appeared ever more clearly. As it was for Jesus, so too it was for John Paul II: in the end words gave way to the extreme sacrifice, to the gift of self. And his death was sealed by a life entirely given to Christ and even physically conformed to him with features of suffering and trusting abandonment in the Heavenly Father's arms. "Let me go to the Father" were his last words, the fulfilment of a life completely spent in striving to know and contemplate the Face of the Lord.

Venerable and dear Brothers, I thank you all for joining me at this Holy Mass of suffrage for beloved John Paul II. I address a special thought to the participants of the First World Congress on Divine Mercy, which is opening this very day and which intends to deepen his rich Magisterium on

the subject. God's mercy, as he himself said, is a privileged key to the interpretation of his Pontificate. He wanted the message of God's merciful love to be made known to all and urged the faithful to witness to it (cf. *Homily at Krakow-Łagiewniki*, 17 August 2002). This is why he desired to raise to the honour of the altars Sr Faustina Kowalska, a humble Sister who, through a mysterious divine plan, became a prophetic messenger of Divine Mercy. The Servant of God John Paul II had known and personally experienced the terrible tragedies of the 20th century and for a long time wondered what could stem the tide of evil. The answer could only be found in God's love. In fact, only Divine Mercy is able to impose limitations on evil; only the almighty love of God can defeat the tyranny of the wicked and the destructive power of selfishness and hate. For this reason, during *his last Visit to Poland*, he said on his return to the land of his birth: "Apart from the mercy of God there is no other source of hope for mankind" (*ibid.*).

Let us give thanks to the Lord for having given the Church this faithful and courageous Servant of his. Let us praise and bless the Blessed Virgin Mary for having watched ceaselessly over his person and ministry, for the benefit of the Christian people and all humanity. And while we offer the redeeming Sacrifice for his chosen soul, let us pray to him to continue to intercede from Heaven for each one of us, especially for me whom Providence called to take up his priceless spiritual legacy. The Church, following his teaching and example, faithfully continues without compromise in her evangelizing mission and never ceases to spread Christ's merciful love, a source of true peace for the whole world. Amen.

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*At the end of Mass the Holy Father greeted the faithful with the following words:*

Before concluding the celebration I would like to address my cordial greeting to you all, dear brothers and sisters who have come from different countries.

I am happy to greet all the English-speaking pilgrims and visitors present at this celebration of the Eucharist. We have remembered with love my venerated Predecessor, Pope John Paul II. May his example of joy and courage in his service to the Church inspire us to embrace with hope and generosity the task of being faithful Christians in our daily lives. May God bless you all!

I invoke the heavenly protection of Mary Most Holy, Mother of the Church, upon all those present and upon all who are linked to us by radio and television.

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