



# The Holy See

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PAPAL MASS FOR THE REPOSE OF THE SOULS  
OF THE CARDINALS AND BISHOPS WHO HAVE DIED IN THE PAST YEAR

## *HOMILY OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI*

*Altar of the Chair in the Vatican Basilica*

*Thursday, 4 November 2010*

[\(Video\)](#)

[Photo Gallery](#)

*Your Eminences,  
Dear Brothers and Sisters,*

“If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above”. The words we have just heard in the second reading (Col 3:1-4) invite us to raise our gaze to the reality of Heaven. With the expression “the things that are above” St Paul means Heaven, for he adds: “where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God”. The Apostle is referring to the condition of believers, of those who are “dead” to sin and whose life “is hidden with God in Christ”. They are called to live daily in the lordship of Christ, the principle and fulfilment of all their actions, witnessing to the new life bestowed upon them in Baptism. This renewal in Christ takes place in the heart of each person. While continuing the struggle against sin, it is possible to grow in virtue, attempting to give a full and willing answer to the grace of God.

Inversely, the Apostle indicates later “the things of the earth”. Thus highlighting that life in Christ entails a “choice of field”, a radical renunciation of everything that — like an anchor — ties man to earth, corrupting his soul. The search for the “things that are above” does not mean that Christians must neglect their earthly obligations and duties, rather that they must not get lost in them, as if they had a definitive value. Recalling the realities of Heaven is an invitation to recognize the relativity of what is destined to pass away, in the face of those values that do not know the

deterioration of time. It is about working, committing oneself, allowing oneself the proper rest, but with the serene detachment of one who knows that he is only a traveller on the way to the heavenly Homeland; a pilgrim, in a certain sense, a foreigner on the path to Eternity.

The late Cardinals Peter Seiichi Shirayanagi, Cahal Brendan Daly, Armand Gaétan Razafindratandra, Tomáš Špidlík, Paul Augustin Mayer, Luigi Poggi have now arrived at this final destination; as have the numerous Archbishops and Bishops who left us in the course of this past year. Let us remember them with affection, thanking God for their gifts to the Church through our brothers who have preceded us in the sign of faith and now rest in the sleep of peace. Our gratitude becomes a prayer of suffrage for them, so that the Lord may receive them in the beatitude of Heaven. We offer this Holy Eucharist for their chosen souls, gathered around the altar on which is made present the Sacrifice which proclaims the victory of life over death, of grace over sin, of Heaven over hell.

We wish to remember our venerable Brothers as zealous Pastors, whose ministry was always marked by the eschatological horizon that sustains the hope of happiness without shadows, and has been promised to us after this life. As witnesses of the Gospel we are called to live the “things that are above”, which are fruits of the Spirit: “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control” (Gal 5:22), as Christians and pastors enlivened by profound faith, by the real desire to be conformed to Jesus and to be profoundly attached to his Person, ceaselessly contemplating his face in prayer. That is why they were able to have a foretaste of “eternal life”, of which the passage of today's Gospel speaks (Jn 3:13-17), and which Christ himself promised “to the one who believes in him”. Indeed the expression “eternal life” designates the divine gift granted to humanity: communion with God in this world and its fullness in that of the future.

Eternal life was opened to us by the Paschal Mystery of Christ and faith is the way to reach it. This is what emerges from Jesus' words to Nicodemus in the Gospel of the Evangelist John: “And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life” (Jn 3:14-15). The explicit reference to the episode narrated in the book of Numbers (21:1-9) highlights the saving force of faith in the divine word. During the Exodus, the Hebrew people rebelled against Moses and God and were punished by the plague of fiery serpents. Moses asked for forgiveness and God, accepting the repentance of the Israelites, ordered him to “make a fiery serpent, and set it on a pole; and every one who is bitten, when he sees it, shall live”. And so it happened. Jesus, in his conversation with Nicodemus, revealed a more profound significance of this event of salvation, referring it to his own death and Resurrection: the Son of Man must be lifted on the wood of the Cross so that whoever believes in him may have life. St John sees precisely in the mystery of the Cross the moment in which the real glory of Jesus is revealed, the glory of a love that gives itself totally in the passion and death. Thus, paradoxically, from a sign of condemnation, death and failure, the Cross becomes a sign of redemption, life and victory, through faith, the fruits of salvation can be gathered.

Continuing this dialogue with Nicodemus, Jesus elaborates further on the salvific meaning of the Cross, revealing with ever greater clarity that it consists in the immense love of God and in the gift of the Only-Begotten Son: "God so loved the world that he gave his Only-Begotten Son". This is one of the central verses of the Gospel. The subject is God the Father, origin of the whole creating and redeeming mystery. The verbs "to love" and "to give" indicate a decisive and definitive act that expresses the radicalism with which God approached man in love, even to the total gift, crossing the threshold of our ultimate solitude, throwing himself into the abyss of our extreme abandonment, going beyond the door of death. The object and beneficiary of divine love is the world, namely, humanity. It is a word that erases completely the idea of a distant God alien to man's journey and reveals, rather, his true face. He gave us his Son out of love, to be the near God, to make us feel his presence, to come to meet us and carry us in his love so that the whole of life might be enlivened by this divine love. The Son of man did not come to be served, but to serve and to give life.

God does not domineer but loves without measure. He does not express his omnipotence in punishment, but in mercy and in forgiveness. Understanding all this means entering into the mystery of salvation. Jesus came to save, not to condemn; with the sacrifice of the Cross he reveals the loving face of God. Precisely by faith in the abundant love that has been given to us in Christ Jesus, we know that even the smallest force of love is greater than the greatest destructive force, which can transform the world, and by this same faith we can have the "reliable hope", in eternal life and in the resurrection of the flesh.

Dear brothers and sisters, with the words of the first reading, taken from the Book of Lamentations, we pray that the Cardinals, Archbishops and Bishops, whom we are commemorating today, generous servants of the Gospel and of the Church, will now be able to know fully "how good the Lord is to the one who hopes in him, to the soul that seeks him" and experience that "in him is found mercy and redemption in abundance" (Ps 129), trying to walk in the path of goodness, sustained by the grace of God, always remembering that "here we have no lasting city, but we seek the city which is to come" (Heb 13:14). Amen.

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