



The Holy See

PAPAL MASS FOR THE REPOSE OF THE SOULS OF THE CARDINALS AND BISHOPS WHO DIED OVER THE COURSE OF THE YEAR

HOMILY OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS

Vatican Basilica, Altar of the Chair

Tuesday, 3 November 2015

[Multimedia]

Today we remember our brother Cardinals and Bishops who departed in the last year. On this earth they loved the Church as their bride, and we pray that in God they may experience complete joy, in the communion of saints.

Let us remember with gratitude the vocation of these sacred Ministers: as pointed out in the Word, it is first of all that of *ministering*, in other words, of serving. While we ask for them the reward promised to “good and faithful servants” (cf. Mt 25:14-30), we are called to renew the decision to serve in the Church. The Lord, who as a servant washed the feet of his closest disciples, asks that as he did, so too should we do (cf. 13:14-15). God served us first. A minister of Jesus, who came to serve and not to be served (cf. Mk 10:45), cannot but be in his turn a Shepherd willing to give his life for the sheep. One who serves and gives seems defeated in the eyes of the world. Because a life divested of itself, losing itself in love, emulates Christ: he conquers death and gives life to the world. One who serves, saves. On the contrary, one who does not live to serve, does not serve to live.

The Gospel reminds us of this. “God so loved the world” (Jn 3:16). It truly is a love so tangible, so tangible that he took our death upon himself. To save us, he went there, to where we had ended up, separating ourselves from God the giver of life: in death, in a sepulchre with no way out. This is the debasement that the Son of God fulfilled, bending down to us as a servant in order to take on all that is ours, until opening wide the doors of life.

In the Gospel Christ compares himself to the “serpent lifted up”. The image refers back to the episode of the poisonous snakes, that in the desert attacked the people on the journey (cf. Num 21:4-9). The Israelites who were bitten by the serpents did not die but lived if they looked at the bronze serpent that Moses, by God’s command, had lifted up on a pole. A serpent saved them from the serpents. The same logic is present in the cross, to which Jesus refers while speaking with Nicodemus. His death saves us from our death.

In the desert the serpents brought about a painful death, preceded by fear and caused by venomous bites. Even to our eyes death always appears to be dark and distressing, just as we experience it, it entered into our world through the devil’s envy, Scripture tells us (cf. Wis 2:24). Jesus however did not flee from it, but took it completely upon himself with all its contradictions. Now we, looking to Him, believing in Him, are saved by Him: “whoever believes in [the Son] may have eternal life”, Jesus twice repeats in the brief passage of the day’s Gospel (cf. vv. 15-16).

This manner of God, who saves by serving us and debasing himself, has much to teach us. We would expect there a triumphant divine victory; Jesus instead shows us a most humble victory. Lifted up on the cross, he allows evil and death to rage against him while he continues to love. It is difficult for us to accept this reality. It is a mystery, but the secret of this mystery, of this extraordinary humility lies entirely in the power of love. In the Pascal mystery of Jesus we see together death and the cure for death, and this is possible through the great love with which God has loved us, through humble love that lowers itself, through service, taking on the condition of servant. Thus Jesus not only took away evil, but transformed it into good. He did not change things with words, but with deeds; not in appearance, but in substance; not superficially, but radically. He made of the cross a bridge to life. We too can win with Him, if we choose willing and humble love, which remains victorious for eternity. It is a love that neither shouts nor imposes itself, but is able to wait with trust and patience, because — as the Book of Lamentations reminds us — it is good to “wait quietly for the salvation of the Lord” (3:26).

“God so loved the world”. We are led to love what we need and what we desire. God, on the other hand, loves the world, in other words us, as we are, to the very end. Also in the Eucharist he comes to serve us, to give us life which saves us from death and fills us with hope. While we offer this Mass for our dear brother Cardinals and Bishops, let us ask for ourselves that which the Apostle Paul exhorts: “Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth” (Col 3:2); on love for God and for our neighbour, instead of on our needs. That we need not concern ourselves with what is lacking here on earth, but with the treasure above; not with what *serves us*, but with what truly *serves*. That the Pascal mystery of the Lord may be sufficient for our life, in order to be free from the stress of ephemeral things, which pass and vanish into thin air. That He, in whom there is life, salvation, resurrection and joy, may be enough for us. Then we will be servants in accordance with his heart: not functionaries who lend their service, but beloved children who give their life for the world.

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