



The Holy See

MASS FOR CARDINALS, ARCHBISHOPS AND BISHOPS
WHO HAD DIED THIS PAST YEAR

HOMILY OF POPE JOHN PAUL II

Tuesday, 10 November 1998

1. *“Our commonwealth is in heaven”* (Phil 3:20).

The Apostle Paul’s words invite us to raise our minds and hearts to heaven, the true homeland of God’s children. The liturgical celebrations of the Solemnity of All Saints and All Souls’ Day have recently turned our attention to it. This is the spiritual atmosphere in which we have gathered in St Peter’s Basilica to offer the Eucharistic Sacrifice for the Cardinals and Bishops who have departed this world for the heavenly homeland during the past year. I would now like to recall by name the venerable Cardinals who have left us: Laurean Rugambwa, Eduardo Francisco Pironio, Antonio Quarracino, Jean Balland, António Ribeiro, Alberto Bovone, John Joseph Carberry, Agostino Casaroli, Anastasio Ballestrero and Alois Grillmeier.

The psalmist’s words: “I wait for the Lord, my soul waits, and in his word I hope” (Ps 129:5) can be fittingly applied to them and to the late Archbishops and Bishops. These Brothers of ours were like “sentinels” in the Church, day and night watching over Christ’s flock. Their apostolic work was based on faith and their attentive vigilance was focused far beyond earthly horizons, because their souls waited for the Lord more than sentinels wait for the dawn (cf. Ps 129:6).

2. As this year, which I have wished to dedicate in a particular way to the Holy Spirit, draws to a close, we have listened to the famous oracle of the prophet Ezekiel in which, with an extraordinarily expressive force, the Spirit of God appears as the principal agent of the resurrection of the people of Israel, rendered inert and almost lifeless for want of confidence. The prophet is invited by God to address his words not only to the dry bones — a metaphor for the “house of Israel” (Ez 37:11) — but even to the Spirit himself, with an unusual and very daring invocation: “Come from the four winds, O Spirit, and breathe upon these slain, that they may live” (Ez 37:9).

How often did our Brothers, whom we remember today, call upon the divine Paraclete in their life and in the exercise of

their ministry: *Veni Sancte Spiritus. Veni Creator Spiritus!* How many times did they “prophesy to the Spirit”, so that he might imbue the People of God with his life-giving grace! Moreover, is not the mission of the ordained minister, and more especially of the Bishop, like a great epiclesis, which culminates in the celebration of the sacraments, especially those of the Eucharist, Confirmation and Orders?

In Christ’s image, every Pastor in the Church is called to make himself an active instrument of the Holy Spirit’s action, which proceeds from the Father to illumine, comfort, heal and inspire.

Let us entrust these faithful ministers of his to the Creator Spirit, so that he may imbue them with fullness of life as they meet Christ in heaven.

3. In the Gospel we heard the account of Christ’s death according to the version of the Evangelist John. This striking Gospel passage enables us to immerse ourselves through meditation in the depths of God, which could be revealed only by the incarnate Word full of grace and truth. When we contemplate the Johannine image of the crucifixion and reflect on those final words, “he gave up his spirit” (Jn 19:30), we understand in the light of faith that precisely there, in the Son of God’s ultimate gift of self, the Father poured out the Holy Spirit in fullness upon the world.

The Good Shepherd, who came so that men “may have life, and have it abundantly” (Jn 10:10), completes his mission at the moment when, nailed to the cross and powerless to accomplish anything other than making the ultimate offering of himself, “gave up his spirit”, and in this supreme act pours out the Holy Spirit for the world’s salvation.

This is the way for every Christian, indeed, for every human being: to fulfil himself by giving himself. But in particular, it is the path for those whom a special gift of grace in the Church has configured to Christ the Good Shepherd, who “lays down his life for the sheep” (Jn 10:11). And just as Christ, after experiencing extreme weakness, was raised with his body by the power of the Holy Spirit, so the same Spirit will raise to new and eternal life those who have generously devoted their lives to the Gospel.

4. “*Behold, your Mother!*” (Jn 19:27a). We would like to conclude our meditation with these last words spoken by Jesus on the cross and addressed to the Apostle John. Our venerable Brothers, the Cardinals and Bishops whom today we entrust to the divine goodness, “have taken Mary to their own home” (cf. Jn 19:27). Let us pray that she, *Mater misericordiae*, will welcome them, with all the saints, to the Father’s house.

Amen.

