



The Holy See

CAPPELLA PAPAIE ON THE FIRST ANNIVERSARY MASS
FOR THE SERVANT OF GOD JOHN PAUL II

HOMILY OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI

Saint Peter's Square

Monday, 3 April 2006

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

In these days, on the first anniversary of his death, the memory of the Servant of God John Paul II is particularly vivid throughout the Church and the world.

With the Marian Vigil yesterday evening, we relived the precise moment of his devout passing one year ago, whereas today we are here in this same St Peter's Square to offer the Eucharistic Sacrifice in suffrage for his chosen soul.

Together with the Cardinals, Bishops, priests and Religious, I greet with affection the numerous pilgrims who have arrived from very many places, especially from Poland, to bear witness to their esteem, affection and deep gratitude. Let us pray for this beloved Pontiff, allowing ourselves to be illuminated by the Word of God we have just heard.

In the First Reading from the Book of Wisdom, we were reminded of the eternal destiny that awaits the righteous: a destiny of superabundant happiness, an incomparable reward for the sufferings and trials they faced during their lives. "God tested them and found them worthy of himself; like gold in the furnace he tried them, and like a sacrificial burnt offering he accepted them" (Wis 3: 5-6).

The term "burnt offering" refers to the sacrifice in which the victim was entirely burned, consumed by the flames; consequently, it was a sign of total offering to God. This biblical expression reminds us of the mission of John Paul II, who made his life a gift to God and to the Church and, especially

in the celebration of the Eucharist, lived out the sacrificial dimension of his priesthood.

Among the invocations dear to him was one that comes from the *"Litaniae di Gesù Cristo Sacerdote e Vittima"* that he chose to place at the end of his book, *Gift and Mystery*, published on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of his ordination to the Priesthood. (cf. pp. 113-116): *"Iesu, Pontifex qui tradidisti te metipsum Deo oblationem et hostiam - Jesus, High Priest who gave yourself to God as offering and victim, have mercy on us"*.

How frequently did he repeat this invocation! It expresses clearly the profoundly priestly character of his whole life. He never made a mystery of his desire to become increasingly one with Christ the Priest through the Eucharistic Sacrifice, a source of tireless apostolic dedication.

It was faith, of course, that was at the root of this total offering of himself. In the Second Reading that we have just heard, St Peter too uses the image of the gold tested by fire and applies it to faith (cf. I Pt 1: 7). In fact, in life's difficulties it is especially the quality of the faith of each one of us that is tried and tested: its firmness, its purity, its consistency with life. Well, the late Pontiff, whom God had endowed with multiple human and spiritual gifts, in passing through the crucible of apostolic labours and sickness, appeared more and more as a "rock" of faith.

To those who had the opportunity to be close to him, that firm and forthright faith was almost tangible. If it impressed the circle of his collaborators, it did not fail during his long Pontificate to spread its beneficial influence throughout the Church in a crescendo that reached its highest point in the last months and days of his life.

It was a convinced, strong and authentic faith - free of the fears and compromises that have infected the hearts of so many people -, thanks partly to his many Apostolic Pilgrimages in every part of the world, and especially thanks to that last "journey", his agony and his death.

The Gospel passage that has just been proclaimed helps us to understand another aspect of his human and religious personality. We might say that among the Apostles, he, the Successor of Peter, supremely imitated John the "beloved disciple", who stood under the Cross with Mary at the moment of the Redeemer's abandonment and death.

The evangelist relates that Jesus, when he saw them standing near, entrusted the one to the other: "Woman, behold, your son!"... "Behold, your mother!" (Jn 19: 26-27). The dying Lord's words were particularly dear to John Paul II. Like the Apostle and Evangelist, he too wanted to take Mary into his home: *"et ex illa hora accepit eam discipulus in sua"* (Jn 19: 27).

The expression *"accepit eam in sua"* is singularly compact. It indicates John's decision to make Mary share in his own life, so as to experience that whoever opens his heart to Mary is actually accepted by her and becomes her own. The motto that stands out in the coat of arms of the

Pontificate of Pope John Paul II, *Totus tuus*, sums up this spiritual and mystical experience well, in a life completely oriented to Christ through Mary: "*ad Iesum per Mariam*".

Dear brothers and sisters, this evening our thoughts turn with emotion to the moment of the beloved Pontiff's death, but at the same time our hearts are, as it were, impelled to look ahead. We feel reverberating within them his repeated invitations to advance without fear on the path of fidelity to the Gospel, to be heralds and witnesses of Christ in the third millennium.

We cannot but recall his ceaseless exhortations to cooperate generously in creating a more just humanity with greater solidarity, to be peacemakers and builders of hope.

May our gaze always remain fixed on Christ, "the same yesterday and today and for ever" (Heb 13: 8), who firmly guides his Church. We believed in his love and it is the encounter with him that "gives life a new horizon and a decisive direction" (cf. *Deus Caritas Est*, n. 1).

May the power of Jesus' Spirit be for you all a source of peace and joy, dear brothers and sisters, as it was for Pope John Paul II. And may the Virgin Mary, Mother of the Church, help us to be in all circumstances, as he was, tireless apostles of his divine Son and prophets of his merciful love. Amen!

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