



The Holy See

**EUCCHARISTIC CONCELEBRATION
IN SUFFRAGE FOR CARDINALS AND BISHOPS
WHO HAVE DIED IN THE PAST YEAR
*HOMILY OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI***

Vatican Basilica

Monday, 3 November 2008

Your Eminences,

Venerable Brothers in the Episcopate and in the Priesthood,

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

On the day after the liturgical commemoration of All Souls, we are gathered today, according to a beautiful tradition, to celebrate the Eucharistic Sacrifice in suffrage for our Brother Cardinals and Bishops who have left this world during the last year. Our prayer is motivated and comforted by the mystery of the communion of saints, a mystery that we have newly contemplated anew in these past days in order to understand it, welcome it and live it ever more intensely.

In this communion we recall with great affection the Cardinals Stephen Fumio Hamao, Alfons Maria Stickler, Aloísio Lorscheider, Peter Poreku Dery, Adolfo Antonio Suárez Rivera, Ernesto Corripio Ahumada, Alfonso López Trujillo, Bernardin Gantin, Antonio Innocenti and Antonio José González Zumárraga. We believe and sense them to be alive in the God of the living. And with them we remember each of the Archbishops and Bishops, who in the last 12 months have passed from this world to the House of the Father. We want to pray for all, letting ourselves be enlightened in mind and heart by the Word of God that we have just heard.

The First Reading a passage from the Book of Wisdom (4: 7-15) reminded us that true, venerable old age is not only length of years, but wisdom and a pure existence, without malice. And if the Lord prematurely calls the righteous to himself, it is due to a loving design for him that is unknown to us. The premature death of a person dear to us becomes an invitation not to persist in living in a

mediocre way, but to strain towards the fullness of life as soon as possible. In the Wisdom text there is a paradoxical vein that we find also in the Gospel pericope (Mt 11: 25-30). In both Readings a contrast emerges between what appears to the superficial glance of men and what, instead, the eyes of God see. The world considers a long life fortunate, but God, more than age, looks at the uprightness of heart. The world gives credit to the "wise" and "intelligent", while God prefers the "lowly". The general teaching that we can draw from this is that there are two dimensions to reality: a more profound, true and eternal one and the other, marked by finitude, transience and appearance. Now, it is important to emphasize that these two dimensions are not placed in simple temporal succession, as if true eternal life were to begin only after death. In reality, true life, eternal life already begins in this world, although within the precariousness of human history; eternal life begins in the measure to which we open ourselves to the mystery of God and welcome it in our midst. It is God, the Lord of life, in whom "we live and move and have our being" (Acts 17: 28), as St Paul said at the Areopagus in Athens.

God is the true wisdom that never ages, the authentic wealth that never corrupts, the happiness to which every man aspires in the depths of his heart. This truth, that passes through the Wisdom Books and re-emerges in the New Testament, comes to fulfilment in the existence and teaching of Jesus. In the perspective of Gospel wisdom, death itself is the bearer of a healthy teaching because it forces us to look reality in the face; it pushes us to recognize the transience of that which appears great and strong in the eyes of the world. In the face of death every reason for human pride vanishes and instead what seriously matters comes to the fore. Everything comes to an end, every one of us is passing through this world. Only God has life in himself; he is life. Ours is a life of participation, given *ab alio*, thus a man can gain eternal life only because of the particular relationship that the Creator himself has established with him. But God, on seeing man distancing himself from him, made a further step, he created a new relation between himself and us, of which today's Second Reading speaks. He, Christ, "laid down his life for us" (1 Jn 3: 16).

If God St John writes has loved us freely, we too can, and we must, let ourselves be taken up in this giving gesture, and make of ourselves a free gift to others. In this way we know God as he knows us; in this way we dwell in him as he has willed to dwell in us, and we pass from death to life (cf. 1 Jn 3: 14) like Jesus Christ, who has overcome death with his Resurrection, thanks to the glorious power of the heavenly Father's love.

Dear brothers and sisters, this Word of life and hope is deeply comforting before the mystery of death, especially when it strikes those who are most dear to us. Today the Lord assures us that our beloved Brothers, for whom we pray particularly in this Holy Mass, have passed from death to life because they have chosen Christ, they have welcomed his sweet yoke (cf. Mt 11: 29) and they dedicated themselves to the service of their brethren. Therefore, even if they must expiate their part of the punishment due to human frailty that marks all of us, helping us to stay humble, fidelity to Christ permits them to enter into the freedom of the children of God. If, however, having to part with them has saddened us, and even now their loss saddens us, faith fills us with an intimate

comfort at the thought that, as it has been for the Lord Jesus, and always thanks to him, death no longer has power over them (cf. Rm 6: 9). Passing through the merciful Heart of Christ in this life they have entered a place of "rest" (Wis 4: 7). And now we like to think of them in the company of the Saints, finally relieved of the bitterness of this life, and we also sense the desire to be able to join such a happy company one day.

In the Responsorial Psalm we have repeated these consoling words: "Goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life; and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord for ever" (Ps 23 [22]: 6). Yes, we love to hope that the Good Shepherd has welcomed these Brothers of ours for whom we are celebrating the divine Sacrifice, at the sunset of their earthly days, and that he admit them into his inmost and blessed presence. The consecrated oil mentioned in the Psalm (23[22]: 5) has been placed three times on their head and once on their hands; the chalice (*ibid.*) of Jesus the Priest has become their chalice as well, which they have raised day after day, praising the name of the Lord. Now they have reached the heavenly pastures, where signs give way to reality.

Dear brothers and sisters, let us unite our common prayer and raise it to the Father of all goodness and mercy so that, through the intercession of Mary Most Holy, the encounter with the fire of his love quickly purifies our late departed friends from every imperfection and transforms them to the praise of his glory. And we pray that we, pilgrims on the earth, will always keep our eyes and heart focused on the ultimate goal for which we yearn, the House of the Father, Heaven. So be it!

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