



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

Thursday, 5 November 2009

Images of celebration

*Venerable Brothers in the Episcopate and in the priesthood,
Dear Brothers and Sisters,*

"I was glad when they said to me, "Let us go to the house of the Lord!". The words of *Psalm* 122[121]: 1 which we have just sung invite us to lift our heart's gaze towards the "house of the Lord", towards the Heavens. It is there that the host of all the Saints whom, a few days ago, the Liturgy brought us to contemplate is mysteriously gathered in the beatific vision of God. The Solemnity of All Saints is followed by the commemoration of all the faithful departed. These two celebrations, lived in a profound atmosphere of faith and prayer, help to us to understand better the mystery of the Church in its totality and to comprehend ever more that life must be lived in continual, vigilant anticipation. It is a pilgrimage towards eternal life, the ultimate fulfilment that gives meaning and fullness to our earthly journey. Already "our feet have been standing" (v. 2) at the gates of the heavenly Jerusalem.

By now the following late Cardinals have reached this definitive destination: Avery Dulles, Pio Laghi, Stéphanos II Ghattas, Stephen Kim Sou-hwan, Paul Joseph Pham Đình Tung, Umberto Betti, Jean Margéot, as have the numerous Archbishops and Bishops who have left us during this past year. We remember them with affection and we give thanks to God for the good that they achieved. We are gathered in this Vatican Basilica, as every year, to offer the Eucharistic Sacrifice for their souls. We think of them in the real and mysterious communion that unites us pilgrims on earth and those who have gone before us into the afterlife, certain that death does not break the

bonds of spiritual fraternity forged by the Sacraments of Baptism and of Holy Orders.

In these our Venerable Brothers we like to recognize the servants of whom the Gospel parable we just heard speaks: faithful servants whom the master finds awake and ready when he comes home from the marriage feast (cf. *Lk*: 36-38); Pastors who have served the Church, providing the flock of Christ with the necessary care; witnesses of the Gospel whom, in the diversity of their gifts and works, have given proof of active vigilance, of generous dedication to the cause of the Kingdom of God. Every Eucharistic Celebration in which these men participated so many times, first as faithful and then as priests anticipates the Lord's promise in the most eloquent way: that he himself, supreme and eternal Priest, will seat his servants at table and will come to serve them (cf. *Lk* 12: 37). Upon the Eucharistic table, nuptial feast of the New Covenant, Christ as the Paschal Lamb makes of himself food for us; destroys death; and gives us his life, life without end. Brothers and sisters, we too must be alert and vigilant: may the master find us so when he returns from the marriage feast, "if he comes in the second watch, or in the third" (cf. *Lk* 12: 37-38). Thus may we too, like the servants in the Gospel, become blessed!

"The souls of the righteous are in the hand of God" (*Wis* 3: 1). The First Reading, taken from the Book of Wisdom, speaks of the righteous who are persecuted, unjustly put to death. But, the sacred Author emphasizes, even if their deaths occurred in circumstances so humiliating and painful as to seem shocking, in truth, for those who have faith this is not so, for "they are at peace". And even if they undergo punishment in the eyes of men, "their hope is full of immortality" (vv. 3-4). The loss of loved ones is painful. The event of death is a disquieting enigma; but for believers, however it occurs, it is always illumined by the "hope of immortality". Faith sustains us in these moments, charged with human sadness and discouragement. "In your eyes, life is not taken away but transformed," the Liturgy recalls, "and whilst the land of this earthly exile is destroyed, an eternal home is being prepared in Heaven" (*Preface, Mass for the Dead*). Dear brothers and sisters, we know well and we experience in our own journeys that there is no lack of difficulties and problems in this life. There are situations of suffering and of pain, difficult moments to understand and accept. All this, however, acquires worth and meaning if it is considered in the perspective of eternity. In fact, every challenge, accepted with persevering patience and offered for the Kingdom of God, already works to our spiritual advantage here on earth and above all in the next life, in Heaven. In this world we are in transit; we are tested in the crucible like gold, as the Sacred Scripture affirms (cf. *Wis* 3: 6). United mysteriously to Christ's passion, we can make of our existence a pleasing offering to the Lord, a voluntary sacrifice of love.

In the Responsorial Psalm and in the Second Reading, taken from the *First Letter of Peter*, we find something of an echo of the words from the Book of Wisdom. While *Psalm* 122, which takes up the song of the pilgrims who come to the Holy City and, after a long journey, reach its gates full of joy, projects a festive feeling of paradise. St Peter exhorts us to keep the perspective of hope a "living hope" (1: 3) alive in our hearts during the earthly pilgrimage. He notes that, in the face of the inevitable dissolution of this world, we are made the promise of "an inheritance which is

imperishable, undefiled, and unfading" (v. 4), because God in his great mercy has given us new life "through the Resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead" (1: 3). This is why we must be "full of joy", even if we are burdened with various afflictions. If, in fact, we persevere in the good, our faith, purified by many trials, will shine in all its splendour one day and will return to our praise, glory, and honour when Jesus manifests himself in his glory. Herein lies the reason for our hope, that already makes us "rejoice with unutterable and exalted joy" here, while we are journeying towards the purpose of our faith: the salvation of souls (cf. vv. 6-8).

Dear brothers and sisters, it is with these sentiments that we wish to entrust to Divine Mercy these Cardinals, Archbishops and Bishops, with whom we have worked together in the Lord's vineyard. Once liberated from whatever remains of their human frailty, may the Heavenly Father welcome them into his eternal Kingdom and confer upon them the reward promised to the good and faithful servants of the Gospel. May the Blessed Virgin, with her maternal care, accompany them and open to them the gates of Paradise. May the Virgin Mary help us too, still travellers upon the earth, to keep our eyes fixed on the homeland that awaits us. May she encourage us to be ready with our "loins... girded and our lamps burning" to welcome the Lord "when he comes and knocks" (Lk 12: 35-36). At any hour and at any moment. Amen!

© Copyright 2009 - Libreria Editrice Vaticana

Copyright © Dicastero per la Comunicazione - Libreria Editrice Vaticana