



The Holy See

MASS FOR THE CARDINALS AND BISHOPS
WHO DIED THIS PAST YEAR

HOMILY OF JOHN PAUL II

Tuesday, 5 November 2002

*Your Eminences,
Brothers in the Episcopate,
Brothers and Sisters,*

1. *"How good is the Lord for those who hope in him, for the soul who seeks him" (Lam 3,25).*

The solemnity of All Saints and the Commemoration of All the Faithful Departed each year arouses in the ecclesial community *an intense and widespread atmosphere of prayer*. It is a mournful and serene atmosphere in which the consoling certainty of the communion of saints softens the sadness that never totally subsides, for the persons who have passed away.

Surrounded by this particular spiritual atmosphere, we find ourselves around the altar of the Lord, united in prayer for the Cardinals and Bishops who in the course of the last twelve months have concluded their earthly day. While, through Christ, *we offer for them our prayers*, we are thankful for the example they left to support us on our way.

2. At this time, the deceased Prelates are very much present to our spirit. Bonds of deep friendship bound us to some among them and I know that I express the sentiments of many among you. I am pleased to mention in a particular way the *venerable Cardinals* who have left us: Paolo Bertoli, Franjo Kuharic, Louis-Marie Billé, Alexandru Todea, Johannes Joachim Degenhardt, Lucas Moreira Neves, François-Xavier Nguyễn Văn Thuận, John Baptist Wu Cheng-Chung. To their memory I wish to unite that of the *Archbishops and Bishops*, who in many parts of the world reached the end of their earthly journey.

These our brothers have reached the goal. There was a day in which each of them with fresh energy pronounced his *"Here I am"* at the moment of being ordained a priest. First in their hearts, then with a loud voice they said, "Here I am". All were united in a special way to Christ, joined with his Priesthood.

At the hour of death, they pronounced the last "Here I am", in union with that of Jesus, who died surrendering his spirit into the hands of the Father (cf. Lk 23,46). For their entire lives, especially after having consecrated themselves to God, they sought "the things above" (Col 3,1). And by word and example they exhorted the faithful to do the same.

3. *They were Pastors*, pastors of the flock of Christ. How many times with the holy People of God they recited the Psalm *"Out of the depths"*. At funerals, in the cemeteries, in the houses where death entered: *"Out of the depths I cry to you, O Lord, ... with you is found forgiveness ... my soul is hoping in the Lord ... because with the Lord there is mercy and with him fullness of redemption"* (Ps 129 [130],1.4.5.7).

To proclaim this pardon of Christ, the mercy of Christ, the redemption of Christ, each of them spent his life until for each one the final hour arrived. Now we are here to pray for them, to offer the Divine Sacrifice for these chosen souls: "Lord, hear my voice" (Ps 129[130],2).

4. They were Pastors. With their preaching they instilled into the hearts of the faithful the earthshaking and comforting truth of the love of God: "God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that whoever believes in him might not die but have eternal life" (Jn 3,16). In the name of the God of love, their hands blessed, their words comforted, their even silent presence witnessed effectively that the mercy of God has no limit, that his compassion is inexhaustible (cf. Lam 3,22).

Some of them had the grace to give witness *in a heroic way*, facing harsh trials and inhuman persecutions. In this Eucharist we give praise to God begging him to be able worthily to honour their memory and the undying bond of brotherly friendship, before we are able to embrace them in the house of the Father.

5. *"When Christ, our life, will be manifested, then you will be manifested with him in glory"* (Col 3,4).

These words of St Paul that we heard in the second reading, invite us to look to the eternal life, into which our Venerable Brothers have completed the final move. In the light of the *Paschal Mystery* of Christ, their death is really the entrance into the fullness of life. In fact, as the Apostle says, the Christian is already "dead" through Baptism and his life is mysteriously "hidden with Christ in God" (Col 3,3).

In this light of faith, we feel even closer to our deceased brothers: death has apparently separated us but the power of Christ and of his Spirit unite us in a more profound way. Nourished with the Bread of life, we too, along with those who have gone before us, await with firm hope our full manifestation.

May the Blessed Virgin Mary watch over them and over us, and obtain for us to come to occupy the "place" in the house of the Father, that Christ our life, has prepared for us (cf. Jn 14,2-3).

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