



The Holy See

PAPAL MASS FOR THE REPOSE OF THE SOULS OF THE CARDINALS AND BISHOPS WHO DIED OVER THE COURSE OF THE YEAR

HOMILY OF POPE FRANCIS

*Vatican Basilica, Altar of the Chair
Monday, 4 November 2013*

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In the spiritual atmosphere of the month of November, which is marked by the remembrance of the faithful departed, we remember our brother Cardinals and Bishops from around the world who have returned to the Father's house during this last year. As we offer this Holy Eucharist for each one of them, let us ask the Lord to grant them the heavenly reward promised to his good and faithful servants.

We have listened to the words of St Paul: "For I am sure that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom 8:38-39).

The Apostle presents the love of God as the deepest and most compelling reason for Christian trust and hope. He lists the opposing and mysterious forces that can threaten the journey of faith. But immediately he states with confidence that even if our entire life is surrounded by threats, nothing will ever be able to separate us from the love which Christ himself has obtained for us by his total self-gift. Even the demonic powers, which are hostile to man, stand powerless before the intimate union of love that exists between Jesus and whoever receives him in faith. This reality of the faithful love that God has for each one of us helps us to face life's daily journey, which sometimes passes quickly and at other times is slow and laborious, with serenity and strength.

Only man's sin can break this bond, and yet even in this case God will always seek man, he will run after him in order to reestablish a union with him that endures even after death; indeed, a union that reaches its culmination in the final encounter with the Father. This certitude gives new and full meaning to earthly life and opens us to hope for life beyond death.

In fact, every time we are faced with the death of a loved one or of someone whom we knew well, the question arises within us: "What will become of his life, his work, his service in the Church?". The Book of Wisdom tells us: they are in the hands of God! The hand is a sign of welcome and protection, it is a sign of a personal relationship of respect and faithfulness: to give a hand, to shake someone's hand. Now, these zealous pastors who have dedicated their lives to the service of God and their brothers, are in the hands of God. All that concerns them is well cared for and will not be corroded by death. All of their days, interwoven as they were with joy and suffering, hope and struggle, faithfulness to the Gospel and passion for the spiritual and material salvation of the flock entrusted to them, are in the hands of God.

Even their sins, our sins, are in the hands of God; those merciful hands, those hands "wounded" by love. It was not by chance that Jesus willed to preserve the wounds in his hands to enable us to know and feel his mercy. And this is our strength, our hope.

This reality, full of hope, is the prospect of the final resurrection, of eternal life to which the "just", those who receive the Word of God and are docile to his Spirit, are destined.

This is how we want to remember our deceased brother Cardinals and Bishops. As men devoted to their vocation and to their service to the Church, who have loved as one loves a bride. In prayer let us entrust them to the Lord's mercy, through the intercession of Our Lady and St Joseph, that he may receive them into his Kingdom of light and peace, there where the just and those who were faithful witnesses of the Gospel live eternally. And let us also pray for ourselves, that the Lord may prepare us for this encounter. We do not know the date, but we do know that the encounter will come.