



The Holy See

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

HOMILY OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS

Vatican Basilica

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In the Gospel passage we have just heard (*Jn 11:17-27*), Jesus says solemnly of himself: “I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die” (vv. 25-26). The radiance of these words dispels the darkness of the profound grief caused by the death of Lazarus. Martha accepts those words and, with a firm profession of faith, declares: “Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, the one coming into the world” (v. 27). Jesus’ words make Martha’s hope pass from the distant future into the present: the resurrection is already close to her, present in the person of Christ.

Today, Jesus’ revelation also challenges us: we too are called to believe in the resurrection, not as a kind of distant mirage but as an event already present and even now mysteriously at work in our lives. Yet our faith in the resurrection neither ignores nor masks the very human bewilderment we feel in the face of death. The Lord Jesus himself, seeing the tears of Lazarus’s sisters and those around them, did not hide his own emotion, but, as the evangelist John adds, himself “began to weep” (*Jn 11:35*). Except for sin, he is fully one of us: he too experienced the drama of grief, the bitterness of tears shed for the loss of a loved one. Yet this does not obscure the light of truth radiating from his revelation, of which the resurrection of Lazarus was a great sign.

Today, then, the Lord repeats to us: “*I am the resurrection and the life*” (v. 25). He summons us to

take once more the great leap of faith and to enter, even now, into the light of the resurrection. *"Whoever lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?"* (v. 26). Once we have made this leap, our way of thinking and seeing things is changed. The eyes of faith, transcending things visible, see in a certain way invisible realities (cf. *Heb 11:27*). Everything that happens is then assessed in the light of another dimension, the dimension of eternity.

We find this in the passage of the Book of Wisdom. The untimely death of the just is viewed in a different light. "There were some who pleased God and were loved by him, and while living among sinners were taken up... so that evil might not change their understanding or guile deceive their souls" (4:10-11). Seen through the eyes of faith, their death does not appear as misfortune but as a providential act of the Lord, whose thoughts are not like ours. For example, the sacred author himself points out that in God's eyes, "old age is not honoured for length of time, or measured by number of years; but understanding is grey hair for anyone, and a blameless life is ripe old age" (4:8-9). God's loving plans for his chosen ones are completely overlooked by those whose only horizon are the things of this world. Consequently, as far as they are concerned, it is said that "they will see the end of the wise, and will not understand what the Lord purposed for them" (4:17).

As we pray for the Cardinals and Bishops deceased in the course of this last year, we ask the Lord to help us consider aright the parable of their lives. We ask him to dispel that unholy grief which we occasionally feel, thinking that death is the end of everything. A feeling far from faith, yet part of that human fear of death felt by everyone. For this reason, before the riddle of death, believers too must be constantly converted. We are called daily to leave behind our instinctive image of death as the total destruction of a person. We are called to leave behind the visible world we take for granted, our usual, commonplace ways of thinking, and to entrust ourselves entirely to the Lord who tells us: *"I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die"* (*Jn 11:25-26*).

These words, brothers and sisters, accepted in faith, make our prayer for our deceased brothers and sisters truly Christian. They enable us to have a truly realistic vision of the lives they lived, to understand the meaning and the value of the good they accomplished, their strength, their commitment and their generous and unselfish love. And to understand the meaning of a life that aspires not to an earthly homeland, but to a better, heavenly homeland (cf. *Heb 11:16*). Prayers for the faithful departed, offered in confident trust that they now live with God, also greatly benefit ourselves on this, our earthly pilgrimage. They instil in us a true vision of life; they reveal to us the meaning of the trials we must endure to enter the kingdom of God; they open our hearts to true freedom and inspire us unceasingly to seek eternal riches.

In the words of the Apostle, we too "have confidence, and... whether we are at home or away, we make it our aim to please him" (*2 Cor 5:8-9*). The life of a servant of the Gospel is shaped by the desire to be pleasing to the Lord in all things. This is the criterion of our every decision, of every step we take. And so we remember with gratitude the witness of the deceased Cardinals and

Bishops, given in fidelity to God's will. We pray for them and we strive to follow their example. May the Lord continue to pour forth upon us his Spirit of wisdom, especially during these times of trial. Especially when the journey becomes more difficult. He does not abandon us, but remains in our midst, ever faithful to his promise: "Remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age" (*Mt* 28:20).