



The Holy See

COMMEMORATION OF ALL THE FAITHFUL DEPARTED

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

St Peter's Basilica, Altar of the Chair

Wednesday, 2 November 2022

[Multimedia]

The readings we have just heard evoke in us, in me, two words: *expectation* and *surprise*.

Expectation expresses the meaning of life, because we live in the expectation of the encounter: the encounter with God, which is the reason for our prayer of intercession today, especially for the Cardinals and Bishops who passed away during the year, for whom we offer this Eucharistic Sacrifice in suffrage.

We all live in expectation, in the hope of one day hearing these words of Jesus addressed to us: “Come, O blessed of my Father” (*Mt 25:34*). We are in the world’s waiting room to enter into paradise, to take part in that feast of all peoples of which the prophet Isaiah spoke (cf. 25:6). He says something that warms our hearts because it will bring to fulfilment precisely our greatest expectations: the Lord “will swallow up death for ever” and “wipe away tears from all faces” (v. 8). It is beautiful when the Lord comes to wipe away tears! But it is awful when we hope that someone else, and not the Lord, wipes them away. And even more awful, not to have tears. Then we could say: “This is the Lord; we have waited for him” — he who wipes away tears — “let us be glad and rejoice in his salvation” (v. 9). Yes, we live in the expectation of receiving such great and beautiful things that we can’t even imagine, because, as the Apostle Paul reminded us, we are “heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ” (*Rm 8:17*) and we expect to live forever, we wait for “the

redemption of our bodies” (cf. v. 23).

Brother and sisters, let us feed our expectation for Heaven, let us exercise the desire for paradise. Today it does us good to ask ourselves *if our desires have anything to do with Heaven*. Because we risk continuously aspiring to passing things, of confusing desires with needs, of putting expectations of the world before expectation of God. But losing sight of what matters to follow the wind would be the greatest mistake in life. Let us look upwards, because we are on a journey toward the Height, whereas the things from down here will not go up there: the best careers, the greatest achievements, the most prestigious titles and awards, accumulated wealth, earthly earnings — all will vanish in an instant, everything. And every expectation placed in those things will be disappointed. And yet, how much time, how much effort and energy do we spend worrying and feeling sad because of these things, letting the tension towards home fade, losing sight of the meaning of the way, of the goal of the journey, the infinite towards which we go, the joy for which we breathe! Let us ask ourselves: do I live out what I say in the Creed, “I look forward” — that is — “to the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come”? And how do I wait? Am I capable of going to the essential or am I distracted by so many superfluous things? Do I cultivate hope or go on complaining, because I give too much value to many things that don’t matter and that will pass?

Today’s Gospel helps us in our expectation for tomorrow. And here emerges the second word I would like to share with you: *surprise*. Because we are greatly surprised each time we listen to Chapter 25 of Matthew. It is similar to the protagonists’ [surprise], who say: “Lord, when did we see thee hungry and feed thee, or thirsty and give thee drink? And when did we see thee a stranger and welcome thee, or naked and clothe thee? And when did we see thee sick or in prison and visit thee?” (vv. 37-39). *When* ? This is how everyone’s surprise is expressed: the amazement of the righteous and the dismay of the unjust.

When ? We too could say this: we would hope that the judgement on life and the world would come in the name of justice, before a court which, weighing every element, would clarify situations and intentions once and for all. Instead, in the divine tribunal, the only chief merit and accusation is mercy towards the poor and the discarded: “As you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me”, sentences Jesus (v. 40). The Most High seems to be in the least. One who lives in Heaven dwells among the world’s most insignificant. What a surprise! But judgement will come in this way because Jesus will be the one to issue it, the God of humble love, He who was born and died poor, who lived as a servant. His measure is a love that goes beyond our dimensions and his measuring stick of justice is gratuitousness. Thus, we know what we have to do in order to prepare ourselves: love gratuitously without expecting anything in return, those on his list of preferences, those who cannot give us anything in return, those who do not attract us, one who serves the least.

This morning I received a letter from a chaplain at a children’s home, a Protestant, Lutheran,

chaplain, in a children's home in Ukraine. Children orphaned by war, children who are alone, abandoned. And he said: "This is my service: accompanying these discarded [children] because they have lost their parents; the cruel war has left them on their own". This man does what Jesus asks of him: to care for the least in the tragedy. And when I read that letter, written with so much pain, I was moved, because I said, "Lord, it is evident that you continue to inspire the true values of the Kingdom".

When?, this pastor will say when he encounters the Lord. That amazed "when", which is repeated four times in the questions humanity addresses to the Lord (cf. vv. 37-39, 44), arrives late, only "when the Son of man comes in his glory" (v. 31). Brothers, sisters, let us not allow ourselves to be surprised as well. Let us be very careful not to sweeten the taste of the Gospel. Because often, out of convenience or comfort, we tend to tone down Jesus' message, to water down his words. Let us admit it: we are becoming rather good at compromising with the Gospel. Always up to here, up to there... compromises. Feeding the hungry yes, but the matter of hunger is complex, and I certainly cannot resolve it! Helping the poor yes, but then injustices must be faced in a certain way and so it's better to wait, also because by getting involved we risk always being disturbed and maybe we would realize that we could have done better; better wait a bit. Being close to the sick and prisoners yes, but on the front pages of newspapers and on *social media*, there are other, more urgent problems, and so why should I be the one to worry about them? Welcoming migrants yes, of course, but it's a complicated general matter, it has to do with politics... I don't get involved in these things... Always compromises: "Yes, yes...", but "no, no". These are the compromises we make with the Gospel. "Yes" to everything, but in the end, "no" to everything. And so, on the strength of "but" and "however" — many times we are men and women of "but" and "however" — we turn life into a compromise with the Gospel. We go from being simple disciples of the Master to masters of complexity, who argue a lot and do little, who more often seek answers in front of a computer than in front of the Crucifix, on the Internet instead of in the eyes of their brothers and sisters; Christians who comment, debate and propose theories, but who do not know the name of even one poor person, who have not visited a sick person in months, who have never fed nor clothed someone, who have never built a friendship with a person in need, forgetting that "the Christian's programme [...] is 'a heart which sees'" (Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas Est*, 31).

When? — the big surprise: surprise on the just side and the unjust side. *When?* Both the righteous and the unjust ask themselves in surprise. There is only one answer: *the when is now*, today, at the end of this Eucharist. Now, today. It is in our hands, in our works of mercy; not in clarifications and in refined analyses, not in individual or social justifications. In our hands, and we are responsible. Today *the Lord reminds us that death comes to make truth of life and remove every mitigating circumstance to mercy*. Brothers, sisters, we cannot say we do not know. We cannot confuse the reality of beauty with artificially made make-up. The Gospel explains how to live in *expectation* : going towards God, loving, because He is love. And, on the day of our departure, *the surprise* will be joyful if we let ourselves be surprised now by the presence of God, who waits for us among the poor and wounded of the world. Let us not be afraid of this surprise:

let us move forward in the things the Gospel tells us, to be judged as righteous at the end. God expects to be caressed not with words, but with actions.

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