



The Holy See

PAPAL MASS FOR THE REPOSE OF THE SOULS
OF THE CARDINALS AND BISHOPS WHO HAVE DIED IN THE PAST YEAR

HOMILY OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI

Altar of the Chair in the Vatican Basilica

Thursday, 3 November 2011

[\[Video\]](#)

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*Venerable Brothers,
Dear Brothers and Sisters,*

The day after the liturgical commemoration of all the faithful departed we are gathered at the altar of the Lord to offer his Sacrifice in suffrage for the cardinals and bishops who, during the course of this year, came to the end of their earthly pilgrimage. With great affection we recall the venerable members of the College of Cardinals who have left us: Urbano Navarrete, SJ, Michele Giordano, Varkey Vithayathil, CSRR, Giovanni Saldarini, Agustín García-Gasco Vicente, Georg Maximilian Sterzinsky, Kazimierz Świątek, Virgilio Noè, Aloysius Matthew Ambrozic, Andrzej Maria Deskur. Together with them we present before the throne of the Most High the souls of the late Brothers in the Episcopate. For each and everyone we offer our prayers, enlivened by faith in eternal life and in the mystery of the communion of saints; a faith full of hope, also enlightened by the Word of God that we have heard.

The passage taken from the Book of the Prophet Hosea turns our thoughts immediately to the Resurrection of Jesus, to the mystery of his death and his reawakening to everlasting life. This text of Hosea — the first half of chapter six — was deeply impressed upon the heart and mind of Jesus. In fact, more than once in the Gospels he repeats verse six: “I desire love and not sacrifice, the knowledge of God, rather than burnt offerings”. Jesus does not cite verse two but he makes it

his own and brings it about in the Paschal Mystery: “After two days he will give life back to us and on the third he will raise us up again, and we will live in his presence”. In the light of these words the Lord Jesus entered the passion, he decisively embarked upon the road to the cross; he spoke openly to his disciples of what was to happen to him in Jerusalem, and the words of the Prophet Hosea echoed in his words: “The Son of man will be delivered into the hands of men and they will kill him; and when he is killed, after three days, he will rise” (Mk 9:31).

The Evangelist notes that the disciples “did not understand the saying, and they were afraid to ask him” (v. 32). We too, in the face of death, cannot fail to experience the sentiments and thoughts dictated by our human condition. And we are always surprised and overcome by a God indeed, who draws so close to us that he does not even stop before the abyss of death, who rather passes through it, remaining in the tomb for two days. However, exactly here the mystery of the “third day” occurs. Christ takes on our mortal flesh completely that it may be invested with the glorious power of God, by the breath of the life-giving Spirit who transforms and regenerates it. This is the baptism of the passion (cf. Lk 12:50), which Jesus received for us and about which St Paul writes in the Letter to the Romans. The expression used by the Apostle — “baptized into his death” (Rom 6:3) — never ceases to surprise us, such is the precision with which he summarizes the breathtaking mystery. Christ’s death is the source of life, for into it God poured all of his love, as in an immense cascade, which makes us think of the image of Psalm 42[41]: “Deep calls to deep / at the thunder of your cataracts / all your waves and all your billows have gone over me” (v. 8). The abyss of death is filled by another abyss that is greater still, namely, the love of God, which is such that death no longer has power over Jesus Christ (cf. Rom 8:9), nor over those who are associated with him through faith and baptism: “If we have died with Christ”, says St Paul, “we believe that we shall also live with him” (Rom 6:8). This “living with Jesus” is the fulfilment of the hope prophesied by Hosea: “... and we will live in his presence” (6:2).

In truth, it is only in Christ that such a hope finds its real foundation. It had previously run the risk of becoming an illusion, a symbol taken from the rhythm of the seasons: “as the showers, as the spring rains” (6:3). At the time of the Prophet Hosea the faith of the Israelites was in danger of being contaminated by the naturalistic religions of the land of Canaan, but this faith is unable to save anyone from death. God’s intervention in the drama of human history, however, does not obey any natural cycle; it only obeys his grace and faithfulness. The new and eternal life is the fruit of the tree of the Cross, a tree that blossoms and bears fruit from the light and power that radiate from the sun of God. Without the Cross of Christ all the energy of nature remains powerless before the negative force of sin. A beneficial force greater than that which moves the cycles of nature is needed, a Good greater than that of Creation itself: a love that proceeds from the “heart” of God himself and that, while it reveals the ultimate meaning of creation, renews it and directs it toward its original and final goal.

All of this happened in those “three days”, when the “grain of wheat” fell into the earth; where it remained for the time necessary to fill up the measure of the justice and mercy of God, and in the

end produced “much fruit”, not remaining alone, but as the firstborn of many brothers (cf. Jn 12:24; Rom 8:29). Now, thanks to Christ and the work accomplished through him by the Most Holy Trinity, the images drawn from nature are no longer only symbols, illusory myths, but speak to us of a reality. At the origin of hope is the desire of the Father and the Son, which we heard about in the Gospel for this liturgy: “Father, I desire that those whom you have given me, may be with me where I am” (Jn 17:24). And among those whom the Father gave to Jesus are also the venerable Brothers for whom we offer this Eucharist: They “knew” God through Jesus, they knew his name, and love of the Father and the Son, the Holy Spirit, dwelled in them (cf. Jn 12:25-26), opening their life to heaven, to eternity. Let us thank God for this priceless gift. And, through the intercession of Mary Most Holy, let us pray that this mystery of communion, which filled their whole existence, be fully realized in each one of them.

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