



The Holy See

CAPPELLA PAPALE FOR THE DECEASED POPES
PAUL VI AND JOHN PAUL I

HOMILY OF JOHN PAUL II

Saturday, 27 September 2003

1. *"To this end Christ died and lived again, that he might be Lord both of the dead and of the living"* (Rom 14: 9).

The words of the Apostle Paul from his Letter to the Romans recall the central mystery of our faith: Christ, died and risen, is the ultimate reason for all human existence.

Every Sunday, the *Day of the Lord*, the Christian people relive this mystery of salvation in a special way. They increasingly deepen their knowledge of it. The Church, Bride of Christ, proclaims with joy and certain hope his victory over sin and death; she walks through the centuries, awaiting his glorious return. The acclamation rings out in the heart of every Holy Mass: "Christ has died, Christ is risen, Christ will come again".

2. Today we celebrate this great Mystery of the faith in special memory of my Venerable Predecessors, *Pope Paul VI* and *Pope John Paul I*. They both departed this world *25 years ago*, respectively on 6 August and 28 September 1978.

I have had various opportunities in recent months to recall the Servant of God Paul VI who, 40 years ago, received the heritage of the Second Vatican Council from Bl. John XXIII. He brought it to completion with wisdom and firmness, guiding the Christian people through the complex and difficult period that followed the Council.

I spoke of John Paul I last 26 August, on the anniversary of his election to the See of Peter. Let us now link them in prayer, while we like to think of them as having entered into "God's time":

that "*eighth day*" which "*the Lord has made*" (cf. Ps. 118[117]: 24), the goal and accomplishment of our earthly days.

3. "*The precepts of the Lord give joy*". This is what we have just repeated in the Responsorial Psalm. *Paul VI's frequent invitation to Christian joy* springs to mind: an invitation which, despite all the difficulties, stemmed from the knowledge that he was constantly adhering to the divine will.

I think again of the *reassuring smile of Pope Luciani*, who conquered the world in the brief span of a month. That smile was the fruit of docile abandonment to the hands of heavenly Providence.

Both these Pontiffs mirror the *peace-giving joy of the Church*. Even when she is tried by great suffering she is not afraid; she does not withdraw into herself but trusts in the Lord. She knows she is guided by the Holy Spirit, and for this reason rejoices in the signs of God's mercy; she admires the marvels that the Almighty works in the little, the poor and those who fear him.

4. "*Whoever is not against us is for us*" (Mk 9: 40). This is what Jesus says in this Sunday's Gospel reading, echoing the First Reading that presents Moses in a state of deep *inner freedom* motivated by trust in God (cf. Nm 11: 29).

We recognize this same attitude in Paul VI and John Paul I, who never yielded to the opinions of the moment or to visions connected to contingent interests. Firmly anchored to the Truth, they did not hesitate to enter into dialogue with all people of good will. They were inwardly free, because they knew that the Holy Spirit "blows where [he] wills" (cf. Jn 3: 8), to direct the journey of the history of salvation in different ways.

In an address to journalists the day after his election, Pope Luciani said: "You will often have to present the Church, to speak about the Church - at times you will have to comment on Our humble ministry. We are confident that you will do so with a love of truth...". And with extreme finesse, he added: "We would also ask you to be willing to contribute to the safeguarding in today's society of a deep respect for the things of God and for the mysterious relationship between God and each of us. It is this that constitutes the sacred dimension of human reality" (1 September 1978; *ORE*, 7 September, p. 3).

5. "*None of us lives to himself, and none of us dies to himself... whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord's*" (Rom 14: 7, 8). St Paul recalls that *Christ's lordship* is a supreme *source of freedom*; a freedom from one's own judgment and that of others, because the only judge is God before whose judgment seat we will all stand (cf. Rom 14: 10). What a grace to be able to count on such a judge! And the Apostle notes further: Jesus Christ (it is) "*who died, yes, who was raised from the dead, who is at the right hand of God, who indeed intercedes for us*" (Rom 8: 34). What peace is imbued in our hearts by the certainty that He is our Redeemer!

Both my Venerable Predecessors, enlightened by this truth, dedicated their entire life to the service of the Gospel.

Let us continue to pray for them, sustained by the hope that one day we too will stand before the merciful Judge in the glory of Heaven. Together with Mary, merciful Mother of the Church and of humanity.

So be it!

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