



The Holy See

EUCCHARISTIC CELEBRATION ON THE FIFTH ANNIVERSARY OF THE DEATH OF THE SERVANT OF GOD JOHN PAUL II

HOMILY OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI

*Vatican Basilica
Monday, 29 March 2010*

(Video)

Images of the celebration

*Venerable Brothers in the Episcopate and in the Priesthood,
Dear Brothers and Sisters,*

We are gathered round the altar, near the tomb of the Apostle Peter, to offer the Eucharistic sacrifice in suffrage for the chosen soul of Venerable John Paul II, on the fifth anniversary of his departure. We are doing so a few days early, because this year 2 April falls on Good Friday. All the same we are in Holy Week, a particularly favourable time for recollection and prayer, in which the Liturgy makes us relive the last days of Jesus' earthly life more intensely. I would like to express my gratitude to all of you who are taking part in this Holy Mass. I cordially greet the Cardinals especially Archbishop Stanisław Dziwisz the Bishops, priests, and men and women religious; as well as the pilgrims who have come specially from Poland, the many young people and the numerous faithful who did not want to miss this Celebration.

In the first Reading from the Bible that has been proclaimed the Prophet Isaiah presents the figure of a "Servant of God" who at the same time is his chosen one, in whom he is well pleased. The Servant was to act with steadfast firmness, with an energy that was never lacking until he had completed the task assigned to him. Yet he appeared not to have at his disposal those human means that seemed indispensable for the implementation of so grandiose a plan. He was to present himself with the power of conviction, and the Spirit whom God had placed within him was

to give him the ability to act with gentleness and force, assuring him of ultimate success. What the inspired prophet says of the Servant we may apply to beloved John Paul II: the Lord called him to his service and, in entrusting to him tasks of ever greater responsibility, also accompanied him with his grace and ceaseless assistance. During his long Pontificate [John Paul II](#) did his utmost to proclaim the law with firmness, without weaknesses or indecision, especially when he had to contend with resistance, hostility or rejection. He knew that the Lord had taken him by the hand and this enabled him to exercise a very fruitful ministry, for which, once again, we give fervent thanks to God.

The Gospel just proclaimed takes us to Bethany, where, as the Evangelist notes, Lazarus, Martha and Mary were giving a supper for the Teacher (Jn 12: 1). This banquet in the house of Jesus' three friends was marked by presentiments of his imminent death: the six days before Easter, the suggestion of Judas, the traitor, Jesus' answer that calls to mind one of the devout burial rites, anticipated by Mary, the hint that they would not always have him with them and the attempt to put Lazarus to death that mirrors the desire to kill Jesus. In this Gospel account there is one gesture to which I would like to draw attention. Mary of Bethany "took 300 grams [a pound] of costly ointment of pure nard and anointed the feet of Jesus and wiped his feet with her hair" (cf. 12: 3). Mary's gesture is the expression of great faith and love for the Lord; it is not enough for her to wash the Teacher's feet with water; she sprinkles on them a great quantity of the precious perfume which as Judas protested it would have been possible to sell for 300 denarii. She did not anoint his head, as was the custom, but his feet: Mary offers Jesus the most precious thing she has and with a gesture of deep devotion. Love does not calculate, does not measure, does not worry about expense, does not set up barriers but can give joyfully; it seeks only the good of the other, surmounts meanness, pettiness, resentment and the narrow-mindedness that human beings sometimes harbour in their hearts.

Mary stood at the feet of Jesus in a humble attitude of service, the same attitude that the Teacher himself was to assume at the Last Supper, when, the fourth Gospel tells us, he "rose from supper, laid aside his garments, and girded himself with a towel. Then he poured water into a basin, and began to wash the disciples' feet" (Jn 13: 4-5), so that, he said, "you also should do as I have done to you" (v. 15): the rule of the community of Jesus is that of love which knows how to serve to the point of offering one's life. And the scent spread: "the house" the Evangelist remarks, "was filled with the fragrance of the ointment" (Jn 12: 3). The meaning of Mary's action, which is a response to God's infinite Love, spreads among all the guests; no gesture of charity and authentic devotion to Christ remains a personal event or concerns solely the relationship between the individual and the Lord. Rather, it concerns the whole Body of the Church, it is contagious: it instils love, joy and light.

"He came to his own home, and his own people received him not" (Jn 1: 11:) Mary's action is in contrast to the attitude and words of Judas who, under the pretext of the aid to be given to the poor, conceals the selfishness and falsehood of a person closed into himself, shackled by the

greed for possession and who does not let the good fragrance of divine love envelop him. Judas calculates what one cannot calculate, he enters with a mean mindset the space which is one of love, of giving, of total dedication. And Jesus, who had remained silent until that moment, intervenes defending Mary's gesture: "Let her alone, let her keep it for the day of my burial" (Jn 12: 7). Jesus understands that Mary has intuited God's love and points out that his "hour" is now approaching, the "hour" in which Love will find its supreme expression on the wood of the Cross: the Son of God gives himself so that many may have life, he descends to the abysses of death to bring man to the heights of God, who is not afraid to humble himself, to make himself "obedient, unto death, even death on a cross" (Phil 2: 8). In the Sermon in which he comments on this Gospel passage St Augustine addresses each one of us, with insistent words, the invitation to enter this circuit of love by imitating Mary's gesture and really placing ourselves in the sequela of Christ. Augustine writes: "Whatever soul of you wishes to be truly faithful, anoint like Mary the feet of the Lord with precious ointment.... Anoint the feet of Jesus: follow by a good life the Lord's footsteps. Wipe them with your hair: what you have of superfluity, give to the poor, and you have wiped the feet of the Lord" (In loh. evang., 50, 6).

Dear brothers and sisters, the entire life of Venerable [John Paul II](#) was lived under the sign of this love, this capacity to give himself generously, without reserve, without measure, without counting the cost. What motivated him was love for Christ to whom he consecrated his life, a superabundant and unconditional love. And precisely because he drew ever closer to God in love, he could become a travelling companion for people today, sprinkling in the world the scent of God's Love. Those who had the joy of knowing him and seeing him regularly could appreciate how alive was his certainty that he would "see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living", as we heard in the Responsorial Psalm (Ps 27[26]: 13); a certainty that accompanied him throughout his life and that was manifest in a special way during the last period of his pilgrimage on this earth: his increasing physical weakness did not corrode his unshakable faith, his luminous hope, his fervent charity. He let himself be consumed for Christ, for the Church, for the whole world: his was a state of suffering lived to the end for love and with love.

In his [Homily for the 25th anniversary of his Pontificate](#) he confided that he had felt echoing in his soul, at the moment of his election, Jesus' question to Peter: "Do you love me? Do you love me more than these? (Jn 21: 15-16); and he added: "Every day that same dialogue between Jesus and Peter takes place in my heart. In spirit, I focus on the benevolent gaze of the Risen Christ. Although he knows of my human frailty, he encourages me to answer confidently, like Peter: "*Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you*" (Jn 21: 17). And then he invites me to take on the responsibilities that he himself has entrusted to me" (*Homily*, 16 October 2003; *L'Osservatore Romano English edition*, 22 October, p. 3). These words are laden with faith and love, the love of God, that conquers everything!

Lastly, I would like to greet the Poles present. Many of you have gathered round the tomb of the Venerable Servant of God with a special feeling as sons and daughters of the same country, who

grew up in the same culture and spiritual tradition. The life and work of John Paul ii, a great Pole, may be a cause of pride for you. However, you must remember that this is also a great call to be faithful witnesses to faith, hope and love, as he himself continuously taught. Through the intercession of John Paul ii, may the Lord's Blessing sustain you always.

As we continue the Eucharistic Celebration, preparing to live the glorious days of the Passion, Death and Resurrection of the Lord, let us entrust ourselves confidently after the example of Venerable John Paul ii to the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of the Church, so that she may sustain us in our commitment to being, on every occasion, unflagging apostles of her divine Son and of his merciful Love. Amen!

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