

Mass for Deceased Clergy and Consecrated Persons

Holy Rosary Cathedral

9 November 2017

Dear Bishop Monroe, brother priests and deacons, consecrated men and women, seminarians and dear friends in Christ:

Introduction

The mystery of the Communion of Saints illumines this month of fading light and the winding down of the liturgical year in particular. In this spiritual atmosphere we gather around the altar of sacrifice in our Cathedral to celebrate this Holy Mass for the repose of the souls of the deceased bishops, priests, and Religious who have zealously laboured – some briefly and some for many years – in service of the Lord and of his people in our Archdiocese.

In the past year we mourn the loss of six priests well known and loved. All were members of Religious communities to whom we owe enormous gratitude for their ministry: two Oblates of Mary Immaculate, Fathers John Brioux and D.D. MacDonald; one Salesian, Father Giovanni Basso; one Redemptorist, Father Brendan Boland; one Dominican, Father Joseph Nguyen; and one Pallotine, Father Xavier Royappan. And we also witnessed the passing to eternal life of five consecrated women: three Sisters of the Child Jesus: Sisters Marianne Flory, Margaret Gormley, and Jean Holick; one Daughter of St. Mary of Providence, Sister Anna Maria Bilotta; and one Good Shepherd Sister, Sister Deborah Isaacs.

With affection let us commend to God the souls of these faithful witnesses who served our Church, thanking him for their gifts of witness and ministry.

Our lives were – and are still – profoundly linked to them. Because the good and the bad that each of us does affects others, for that reason our prayers can help the faithful departed in need of purification after death before beholding the very face of God.

Death

Today's celebration, as does the whole month of November, sets before us the reality of death in sober, non-sentimental tones. All of us must make this journey through the doors of death: sooner or later, with more pain or less, but everyone must.

Dear brothers: More than ever, I believe that it is necessary to evangelize our people about the reality of death and eternal life, so that the truth of the Church's teaching does not get confused with superstitious beliefs and sentimental trivialities¹

The legalization of euthanasia and physician-assisted suicide make it all the more imperative not only vigorously to oppose such practices but also to reflect seriously on the *ars moriendi* – the art or the craft of dying well, which for Christians, means dying in light of the Paschal

¹ Benedict, Angelus (2 November 2008).

Mystery of Jesus.

Fear of Death

Why do most of us feel fear before death? We are afraid, I think, because we are afraid of that possible nothingness, of leaving this world for something we don't know, something unknown to us. Furthermore, we are afraid in the face of death because, as we find ourselves approaching the end of life, we fear that all our actions will be made known and judged: the way in which we have lived our lives, above all, those moments of darkness which we often skillfully removed, or tried to remove, from our conscience.²

Why Not Resigned to Death

At a human level, we are afraid, but not resigned to death. Why has humanity across the ages, for the most part, never wanted to accepted the belief that beyond life there is simply nothing? We cannot accept that “all that is beautiful and great, realized during a lifetime, should be suddenly erased, should fall into the abyss of nothingness. Above all, we feel that love calls and asks for eternity, and it is impossible to accept that it [love] is destroyed by death in an instant.”³ We need eternity for

² Cf. Benedict, General Audience (2 November 2011).

³ Benedict, General Audience (2 November 2011).

every other hope is too brief, too limited for us.⁴ By its nature, human life yearns for something greater which transcends its earthly experience; the human yearning for justice, truth and unending happiness is irrepressible. In the face of the enigma of death, there is a strong conviction that a Last Judgment will re-establish justice, and the expectation of a definitive encounter in which each person will be given their reward.⁵

A fundamental mark of Christians is our sense of expectation of such a final encounter with God. We reaffirmed that expectation just now in the Responsorial Psalm for this Mass: “My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When shall I come and behold the face of God?” (Ps 42:2). These poetic words poignantly convey our watchful and expectant yearning for God’s love, beauty, and gift of joy.

This Psalm has put on our lips the acute longing of a Jew far from Jerusalem and the Temple, who desires to return there to stand once again before the Lord. The Psalmist makes room for the laments of the soul but at the end of his wonderful hymn he sings a refrain full of trust: “Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you disquieted within me? Hope in God, for I shall again praise him, my help and my God” (Ps

⁴ Cf. Benedict, General Audience (2 November 2011).

⁵ Cf. Benedict, Angelus (1 November 2006).

42:5-6). When read in the Church, in the light of Christ's Death and Resurrection, these words reveal the fullness of their marvellous truth: not even death can make the believer's hope fruitless, because for our sake Christ entered the sanctuary of Heaven, and it is there that he desires to lead us, after having prepared a place for us (cf. Jn 14:1-3).⁶

St. Paul: Foundation of Our Hope Is God's Enduring Love

Indeed, in our Second Reading, St. Paul beautifully expresses the fundamental basis of our hope. It is our radical belonging to Christ, and the fact that we are in him and he in us, that fills us with hope. In short, we can truthfully exclaim with the Apostle: "If God is for us, who is against us?" (Rom 8:31). And the reply comes: "For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor Angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom 8: 39).

St. Paul presents the love of God as the deepest and most compelling reason for Christian trust and hope. This reality of the faithful love that God has for each one of us helps us to face death with serenity and strength.⁷

⁶ Benedict XVI, Homily (5 November 2007).

⁷ Cf. Francis, Homily (4 November 2013).

Gospel

When we turn to today's Gospel, we read of Jesus' acceptance of death as the completion of the mission given him by the Father: "It is finished" (Jn 19:30). With these words the fragile shell of the humanity taken up by the Son of God is shattered and a flood of love bursts forth, destroying the yoke of death and opening to us the doors of life. We are all bound to follow the journey that he made. And it was Jesus himself who opened the door: with his Cross he opened the door of hope, he opened the door for us to the contemplation of God.⁸ "In the Pascal Mystery of Jesus we see together death and the cure for death. . . . He made of the Cross a bridge to life."⁹

We human beings need a brother who will take us by the hand and lead us across the bridge of death to the "Father's house" (Jn 14:2). And we need someone who knows the way. God, with his "super-abundant" love for us (cf. Eph 2:4), gave us his Son not only to point it out to us but to become himself "the way" (Jn 14:6).¹⁰

Today, then, we renew our hope that with death "life is changed and not ended," as we sing in the Preface. When we make the journey of

⁸ Francis, Homily (2 November 2017).

⁹ Cf. Francis, Homily (3 November 2015).

¹⁰ Benedict XVI, Homily (11 November 2005).

death – and it is a journey – we fall into the Lord’s hands. Where no one can accompany us any longer and where we can take nothing with us, he is there waiting for us.¹¹

Conclusion

Dear brothers and sisters: if I have only one word to leave with you it is this: let us never trivialize the solemnity of death but meditate prayerfully on the last things, our minds and hearts turned with hope in Jesus Christ toward our final and wondrous destiny, which gives meaning to our daily lives.

We now continue our offering of the Eucharist for the faithful departed whom we are recalling, and who have preceded us this past year in the last journey, to eternal life. May the intercession of our patrons, the Blessed Virgin Mary and St. John Paul II, speed them on their way to the Father’s house, and may we one day join them in the glory of the heavenly Jerusalem.

Eternal rest grant unto them, O Lord, and let perpetual light shine upon them. Amen.

✦ J. Michael Miller, CSB
Archbishop of Vancouver

¹¹ Benedict XVI, Angelus (2 November 2008).