

Mass for Deceased Clergy and Consecrated Persons

Holy Rosary Cathedral

7 November 2018

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

Introduction

Today the family of our local Church lives is gathered around the Lord in offering his redeeming Sacrifice for the repose of the souls of our deceased bishops, priests, deacons, and consecrated women and men. With faith and dedication, they gave lively witness to the Gospel among us and spent themselves in the service of the faithful whom they loved.

Our prayer is accompanied by emotions, memories and gratitude for them. Many of their faces are still present to us: from the oldest, Father Jim Fagan, ordained nearly 70 years, to the youngest, Father “Mon” Luis, of the Friars of the Atonement, ordained fewer than ten. We also recall two other diocesan priests: Father Matthew Bradley and Father Tim McCarthy; Father Lawrence Bileski, Benedictine monk from the Abbey; two Oblate missionaries: Fathers Gerry Guillet and James Jordan; and Father Vincent Paczkowski, a Salesian, who was with us for less than a year. We remember with affection as well Deacon Guy Delionnet and Sister Mary Kate Corrigan of the Sisters of the Child Jesus.

We raise our heartfelt thanks to God for the gift that he made to the

Church through each one of them, and for all the good in so many different apostolic works which, with his grace, they were able to carry out for their brothers and sisters.

In the Communion of Saints we remain united with them as pilgrims on earth, since death does not break the bonds of spiritual fraternity forged by the Sacrament of Baptism and, for many, also of Holy Orders.¹

At the end of life, death deprives us of all that is earthly, but not of that Baptismal grace by which we are inseparably associated with Our Lord's Paschal Mystery. We are emptied of everything of this world but we remain clothed in Christ. That's how the baptized cross the threshold of death to be presented to the just and merciful Lord.

In order that the white garment received in Baptism may be purified of every speck and stain, the community of believers offers the Mass and other prayers for those whom death has called to pass from time to eternity.² In explaining the Church's teaching on purgatory, Cardinal Ratzinger once wrote: "Man is the recipient of divine mercy yet this does not exonerate him from the need to be transformed. Encounter with the Lord is this transformation. It is the fire that burns away our

¹ Cf. Benedict XVI, Homily (5 November 2009).

² Cf. Benedict XVI, Homily (4 November 2006).

dross and re-forms us to be vessels of eternal joy.”³

Conquering Death with Jesus

In praying for our brothers and sisters today, we cannot but think that one day our own names will be read out in a similar fashion. Each of us is passing through this world as a wayfarer. As we make this journey, the Book of Lamentations wisely counsels us that “the Lord is good to those who wait for him, to the soul that seeks him. It is good that one should wait quietly for the salvation of the Lord” (Lam 3:25-26).

And that salvation comes from Jesus Christ. In his supreme act of love on the Cross, he immersed himself in the abyss of death and conquered it. By rising from the dead, he opened for us the doors of eternity.

Christ himself will therefore sustain us through the night of our own death. We but follow the path that he has already taken. “And it was Jesus himself who opened the door [to life]: with his Cross he opened the door of hope.”⁴ In that final journey he will be there to accompany us. He is the Good Shepherd, on whose guidance through the valley of darkness we can rely without fear, for he knows the way well,

³Joseph Ratzinger, *Eschatology: Death and Eternal Life*, 230-231

⁴ Francis, Homily (2 November 2016).

through the darkness into the light.⁵

Death thus opens to life. Eternal life is not an endless re-run of the present, but something completely new, far beyond our expectations: for, as St. Paul writes, “eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man conceived, what God has prepared for those who love him” (1Cor 2:9).

“Faith tells us that the true immortality for which we hope is . . . a relationship of full communion with the living God: it is resting in his hands, in his love, and becoming in him one with all the brothers and sisters that he has created and redeemed, with all Creation.”⁶ Heaven will be life in its fullness: life in God – “a life of which we now have only a glimpse as one sees blue sky through fog.”⁷

Hope That Does Not Disappoint

Our hope is founded on the solid foundation of the love of God shown on the Cross. From there Jesus said to the repentant thief being crucified with him: “Today you will be with me in Paradise” (Lk 23:43). “Yesterday’s thief can be tomorrow’s saint.”⁸ A man who had likely

⁵ Cf. Benedict XVI, Homily (2 November 2011).

⁶ Francis, Homily (3 November 2015).

⁷ Benedict XVI, Homily (3 November 2012).

⁸ Cardinal Basil Hume, *Seven Last Words* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd,

been an outcast his whole life is admitted to Jesus' company forever.

These consoling words of the Lord, which we all wish to hear when we are dying, are in response to the simple, but fervent and daring, prayer of a justly convicted criminal: "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom" (Lk 23:42). And the Lord responded, as is so often the case, with a generosity that far exceeded the thief's request.

The grace, mercy and forgiveness offered to the criminal on Golgotha are meant for us, too. God wants us to recognize ourselves in this Good Thief: that, however we may have thwarted his saving plan by our sins, we can still cry out now and at the hour of our death: "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom" (Lk 23:42).

Conclusion

As we give thanks for the generous service to the Gospel and the Church of our deceased brothers and sisters, we can almost hear them repeat with the Apostle Paul: "Hope does not disappoint" (Rom 5:5). God is faithful, and our hope in him is guaranteed by Christ, who himself lived in the flesh the experience of death in order to triumph over it with his wondrous Resurrection.

Let us invoke for them and for all the faithful departed the maternal intercession of Mary, Queen of the Holy Rosary: that they may

2009), 24.

share in the eternal banquet of which, with faith and love, they had a foretaste in the course of their earthly pilgrimage⁹ – as we do now in this Eucharist we are celebrating.

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

✦ J. Michael Miller, CSB
Archbishop of Vancouver

⁹ Francis, Homily (3 November 2017).