

**HOMILY FOR THE MASS FOR THE DECEASED MEMBERS
OF THE POLISH CLERGYMAN'S SOCIETY
OF THE ARCHDIOCESE OF NEWARK AND THE DIOCESES OF PATERSON AND METUCHEN
DIOCESAN SHRINE OF ST. JOHN PAUL II, HOLY ROSARY CHURCH
PASSAIC, NEW JERSEY
NOVEMBER 29, 2016**

I am very pleased to be with you at Holy Rosary Church in this Diocesan Shrine of St. John Paul II as we conclude the month of November with this Mass for the Deceased Members of your Society. As the Apostolic Nuncio, the Holy Father's personal representative in this country, I wish to assure you of his spiritual closeness and prayers. I am grateful for the kind invitation of Bishop Serratelli and for the presence of so many clergy, who have committed themselves to the pastoral care of Catholics, especially of Polish descent, and who have enriched the Church with their piety and traditions, offering welcome, assistance, and, above all, the gift of faith. Your predecessors worked tirelessly to build a culture of encounter. In a sense, they anticipated the words of Pope Francis, who speaks of building a culture of encounter here in the United States:

"Our great challenge is to create a culture of encounter, which encourages individuals and groups to share the richness of our traditions and experiences, to break down walls and to build bridges." (Video message to the General Assembly of the USCCB, 14-17 November 2016)

In the end, we all will encounter the Lord, the Just Judge, who is *slow to anger and abounding in kindness*. We gather today to pray for the members of your society who have passed from this life to the next. As members of the clergy, among other things, they strived, and at times, struggled to fulfill their mission of sanctifying God's people through preaching, through the sacraments and through prayer. Now, through the merits and intercession of the saints, including those of Pope John Paul II who preached in this church, and through our priestly prayer, we commend our brothers who have fallen asleep in the Lord to the Divine Mercy, remembering the words of the Book of Wisdom: *The souls of the just are in the hands of God, and no torment shall touch them.* (Wisdom 3:1-2)

His Holiness points out that:

"Even their sins, our sins, are in the hands of God; those merciful hands, those hands 'wounded' by love. It was not by chance that Jesus willed to preserve the wounds in his hands to enable us to know and feel his mercy. This is our strength, our hope. This reality, full of hope, is the prospect of the final resurrection, of eternal life to which the 'just', those who receive the Word of God and are docile to his Spirit, are destined." (Homily of Pope Francis, 4 November 2013)

In praying for our beloved dead, especially the ministers of the Lord, we recall the close connection between we who still walk upon earth and they who have already reached eternity. In praying for the dead, we, and the whole Church, show fraternal charity toward the departed brethren, especially those who have no one to pray for them or who have long been forgotten. As the *Catechism* (2635) says, intercession is a "characteristic of a heart attuned to God's mercy." The fruits of the recently concluded Jubilee Year should be this – to have a heart ever-more attuned to God's mercy.

In praying for the dead, the Church contemplates the Mystery of the Resurrection of Christ, who obtains salvation and eternal life for us through his Cross. Death does not have the last word. In fact, it is the Lord's Cross, which points us to the light of Easter and the Resurrection, which inaugurates – a new era - the "end of times" (1 Pt 1:20) and which is an invitation to the joyful hope of seeing God face to face. *Blessed are the pure of heart, for they shall see God.* (Mt 5:8)

It is in this encounter that all our hopes and desires will be fulfilled. We do not know exactly what this will be like, but John instructs us: *Beloved, we are God's children now; what we shall be*

has not yet been revealed. We do know that when it is revealed we shall be like him, for we shall see Him as He is. (1 Jn 3:2)

Something new happens in the mystery of death; a new stage of the journey begins. Just as one liturgical year has ended, so now with Advent, a new one begins. Advent reminds us to wait in expectation – not just in hope of the celebration of the Lord's birth, but, especially in expectation of his coming at the end of time and at the end of our own life. While reminding us of the need for conversion and to focus on things eternal, Advent directs our attention to the encounter with the One who saves us.

Of course, at a human level, we are sad that we have lost loved ones, especially our brothers, those who ministered to us, who showed kindness and mercy, who gave us good example in this life. Nevertheless, they have a new beginning. Recall the consoling words from our First Reading from Isaiah: "*The Lord God will wipe away the tears from all faces ... On that day, it will be said: 'Behold our God, to whom we looked to save us! This is the Lord for whom we looked; let us rejoice and be glad that He has saved us.'*" (Is 25: 7-9)

Yes. God comes to save. In Jesus, God's love overcomes the loneliness and isolation of death. Only those who can recognize a hope in death – the hope of the Resurrection – can live a life based on hope. These priests, for whom we pray, lived and ministered in this hope – the hope of an eternal reward. Jesus says, "*Rejoice and be glad, for your reward will be great in heaven*". (Mt 5:12a)

Now it is time for them to receive their reward. Indeed, our brothers have fallen asleep in the Lord but with our prayers we help them to enter into the Joy of the Master, where they shall receive their reward for their labors, for their devotion and for their love, hearing the words: "*Well done, good and faithful servant. Come, share your Master's joy.*" (Mt 25:21)