

Anniversary of the Deceased of the Order of Preachers

Verano Cemetery, 11 November 2023

Homily of the Master of the Order

We are gathered around the Eucharistic table to give thanks to the Lord for the gift of the lives and vocations of our dear departed brothers and sisters of the Order. Last November 8, we celebrated the commemoration of all the deceased members of the Dominican Family. We have already prayed for our deceased. Why should we come here, to the Verano Cemetery?

Let us remember that the word 'cemetery' derives from the Greek *koimeterion*, which means *dormitory*, a place to sleep and rest. We come here as an act of fraternal charity, to manifest our love for our departed brothers and sisters who sleep in the sleep of death. We come here as an act of faith in the resurrection of the body at the end of time. We visit cemeteries because they are holy ground. Cemeteries remind us that the human body, though dead, is sacred, because it was once a temple of the Holy Spirit. We are temples of the Holy Spirit, according to St Paul. There is a Dominican friar who weighs two hundred and fifty kilos. He said to us: 'I am a temple of the Holy Spirit, I am a cathedral of the Holy Spirit!' As I look at you, brothers and sisters, I see that some of you are temples and some of you are little chapels of the Holy Spirit. We are temples because God dwells in us. However, sometimes we feel that we are not a temple, but a "sacristy" or a storehouse where used candles are kept. Perhaps this is why we always pray for our own conversion. It is also why we pray for our deceased brothers and sisters. Even though we are only a 'sacristy', an important part, but not yet exactly the temple, there is something that is sacred about us: the indelible sign of the baptism we have received. When we were brought into the church to be baptised, we became sons and daughters of God and the Holy Spirit took up residence within us.

Burial in cemeteries or other sacred places is a fitting means of expressing the compassion and respect due to the bodies of the faithful departed, which through Baptism have become temples of the Holy Spirit and which, "as tools and vessels, the Spirit has graciously used to accomplish many good works".¹ The mortal remains of our brothers and sisters are like temples which, for the time being, are in a certain sense empty, but which will one day be revived by the resurrection of the body, which we profess in faith.

Every day we pray the *de profundis* in our communities. The Church teaches that the deceased do not yet enjoy the beatific vision and "are not in a condition to be able to pray, but rather are in need of prayers". The Holy Mass we celebrate today is an act of love and charity for our deceased brothers and sisters of the Order of Preachers.

¹ Instruction *Ad resurgendum cum Christo* on the burial of the dead and the preservation of ashes in the case of cremation, Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, 2016.

As I conclude this reflection, I wish to recall the beautiful prayer of our brother Bede Jarret, OP:

"It seems that we restore you to our brothers and sisters,
O God, who first gave them to us.
However, since you have not lost them by giving them away,
so we do not lose them when they return to you.
Not as the world gives, do you give, O Lord.
What you give, you do not take away,
for what is yours is also ours, if we are yours.
Life is eternal and love is immortal,
death is only a horizon,
and a horizon is nothing but the limit of our sight.
Lift us up, mighty Son of God, that we may see beyond;
cleanse our eyes so that we can see more clearly;
bring us closer to You,
so that we can know that we are closer
to our loved ones who are with you.
And while you prepare a place for us,
prepare us for that happy place too,
that where you are, we may be also". Amen.