

# Homily of Holy Father at Funeral of Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI

Thursday 5<sup>th</sup> January 2023

"Father, into your hands I commend my spirit" (Lk 23:46). These were the final words spoken by the Lord on the cross; his last breath, as it were, which summed up what had been his entire life: a ceaseless self-entrustment into the hands of his Father. His were hands of forgiveness and compassion, healing and mercy, anointing and blessing, which led him also to entrust himself into the hands of his brothers and sisters. The Lord, open to the individuals and their stories that he encountered along the way, allowed himself to be shaped by the Father's will. He shouldered all the consequences and hardships entailed by the Gospel, even to seeing his hands pierced for love. "See my hands", he says to Thomas (Jn 20:27), and to each of us: "See my hands". Pierced hands that constantly reach out to us, inviting us to recognize the love that God has for us and to believe in it (cf. 1 Jn 4:16).[1]

"Father into your hands I commend my spirit". This is the invitation and the programme of life that he quietly inspires in us. Like a potter (cf. Is 29:16), he wishes to shape the heart of every pastor, until it is attuned to the heart of Christ Jesus (cf. Phil 2:5). Attuned in grateful devotion, in service to the Lord and to his people, a service born of thanksgiving for a completely gracious gift: "You belong to me... you belong to them", the Lord whispers, "you are under the protection of my hands. You are under the protection of my heart. Stay in my hands and give me yours".[2] Here we see the "condescension" and closeness of God, who is ready to entrust himself to the frail hands of his disciples, so that they can feed his people and say with him: Take and eat, take and drink, for this is my body which is given up for you (cf. Lk 22:19). The total synkatabasis of God.

Attuned in prayerful devotion, a devotion silently shaped and refined amid the challenges and resistance that every pastor must face (cf. 1 Pet 1:6-7) in trusting obedience to the Lord's command to feed his flock (cf. Jn 21:17). Like the Master, a shepherd bears the burden of interceding and the strain of anointing his people, especially in situations where goodness must struggle to prevail and the dignity of our brothers and sisters is threatened (cf. Heb 5:7-9). In the course of this intercession, the Lord quietly bestows the spirit of meekness that is ready to understand, accept, hope and risk, notwithstanding any misunderstandings that might result. It is the source of an unseen and elusive fruitfulness, born of his knowing the One in whom he has placed his trust (cf. 2 Tim 1:12). A trust itself born of prayer and adoration, capable of discerning what is expected of a pastor and shaping his heart and his decisions in accord with God's good time (cf. Jn 21:18): "Feeding means loving, and loving also means being ready to suffer. Loving means giving the sheep what is truly good, the nourishment of God's truth, of God's word, the nourishment of his presence".[3]

Attuned also in devotion sustained by the consolation of the Spirit, who always precedes the pastor in his mission. In his passionate effort to communicate the beauty and the joy of the Gospel (cf. Gaudete et Exsultate, 57). In the fruitful witness of all those who, like Mary, in so many ways stand at the foot of the cross. In the painful yet steadfast serenity that neither attacks nor coerces. In the stubborn but patient hope that the Lord will be faithful to his promise, the promise he made to our fathers and to their descendants forever (cf. Lk 1:54-55).

Holding fast to the Lord's last words and to the witness of his entire life, we too, as an ecclesial community, want to follow in his steps and to commend our brother into the hands of the Father. May those merciful hands find his lamp alight with the oil of the Gospel that he spread and testified to for his entire life (cf. Mt 25:6-7).

At the end of his Pastoral Rule, Saint Gregory the Great urged a friend to offer him this spiritual accompaniment: "Amid the shipwreck of the present life, sustain me, I beseech you, by the plank of your prayer, that, since my own weight sinks me down, the hand of your merit will raise me up". Here we see the awareness of a pastor who cannot carry alone what in truth he could never carry alone, and can thus commend himself to the prayers and the care of the people entrusted to him.[4]God's faithful people, gathered here, now accompanies and entrusts to him the life of the one who was their pastor. Like the women at the tomb, we too have come with the fragrance of gratitude and the balm of hope, in order to show him once more the love that is undying. We want to do this with the same wisdom, tenderness and devotion that he bestowed upon us over the years. Together, we want to say: "Father, into your hands we commend his spirit".

Benedict, faithful friend of the Bridegroom, may your joy be complete as you hear his voice, now and forever!

[1] Cf. *BENEDICT XVI, Deus Caritas Est, 1.*

[2] Cf. *ID., Homily for the Chrism Mass, 13 April 2006.*

[3] *ID., Homily for the Beginning of the Pontificate, 24 April 2005.*

[4] Cf. *Ibid.*