



On Friday Pope Francis said that in contemplating death we are reminded of our ultimate purpose – and how the choices we make here on earth will determine whether we eventually spend eternity in heaven.

“A fundamental mark of the Christian is a sense of anxious expectation of our final encounter with God,” the Pope said Nov. 3. “Death makes definitive the ‘crossroads’ which even now, in this world, stands before us: the way of life, with God, or the way of death, far from him.”

The Pope’s reflection on life and death was made in a special Mass at St. Peter’s Basilica for the souls of the cardinals and bishops who have died in the past year.

In his homily Francis reflected on the longing found in the words of the Responsorial Psalm: “My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When shall I come and behold the face of God?”

These words, he said, were impressed upon the souls of the cardinals and bishops remembered in today’s Mass. They served the Church and the people entrusted to them while keeping their eyes set on the prospect of eternity.

Today’s celebration of the Mass can help us to do the same, he said. In praying for the dead we are confronted with the reality of our own death, and though it may renew our sorrow for our friends and family members who have died, it also increases our hope.

We especially find hope in the Eucharist, he said. In the Eucharist is the physical expression of Jesus’ words in the Gospel of John: “I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats of this bread will live forever.”

“These words evoke Christ’s sacrifice on the cross. He accepted death in order to save those whom the Father had given him, who were dead in the slavery of sin. By his love, he shattered the yoke of death and opened to us the doors of life.”

When we receive the body and blood of Jesus, he said, we unite ourselves to his faithful love and to his “victory of good over evil, suffering and death.”

In this divine bond with the charity of Christ we can know that communion with those who have died before us is not “merely a desire,” but that it “becomes real,” he said.

Francis closed saying that through his death and resurrection, Jesus has shown us that “death is not the last word.” And faith in this resurrection transforms us into “men and women of hope, not despair, men and women of life, not death.”

“This hope, rekindled in us by the word of God, helps us to be trusting in the face of death.”