

18.11.68

TAPE : Angelus

PS 129

<sup>the 'De Profundis'</sup>

Ps 129 <sup>the 'De Profundis'</sup> a prayer of repentance and trust, doesn't appear in the texts of the Mass for the Dead, yet it's associated with other prayers for the dead and is possibly the psalm most people would first think of if asked to choose one to suit a service of prayer for those who have died. That's one reason why I've begun our prayer today with that Psalm, for, during this month of November I think we should give special emphasis to remembering and praying for all who have died - our own closest relatives & friends, people we've known in life, people who've died tragically, the victims of hate, murder, war, and the very many unknown people who have few <sup>if any</sup> friends to mourn them - like <sup>the</sup> silent, withdrawn old man I knew in a hospital once (I can't <sup>over</sup> remember his name): when he died, no relatives of his could be found, no friends came to the mortuary, and at his simple funeral there was only the house-dweller and myself. There was, though, another reason I began today with a Psalm, and that was, to remind or ask you to remember in your prayers a biblical scholar, a well-known figure who died on Saturday, Cardinal Bea. When important people die, everyone knows about it, people express sorrow, or shock or regret - it's news for a few days: but how often do we think actually to pray for them as well?

PRAYERS.

Listen now to the hymn of praise, the Sanctus, from Fauré's Requiem

Fauré: Requiem  
(Sanctus)

I mentioned the death of Cardinal Bea, not just because he was a cardinal or even that he was a Jesuit, but because of the work that he's been engaged in in his old age (he was 87) and for which he had become a well-known name ~~both~~ <sup>both</sup> within and outside the Catholic Church - and all within less than 10 years. He was President of the Vatican Secretariat for Christian Unity since it was set up by Pope John who was his exact contemporary and who first brought him into the limelight by making him a Cardinal - being a Jesuit, that in itself gave him prominence, for few Jesuits have become Cardinals, and only on the strongest insistence by the Pope. Bea's world before that had been mainly in the scholarly world of scripture studies, where among other things, he built up the traditions of solid, germane, research in the Pontifical Biblical Institute of which he was president for many years. He was behind the important encyclical letter on the study of scripture which Pope Pius XII issued in 1943 - a letter which opened up and encouraged deeper <sup>scholarly</sup> ~~scholarly~~ Catholic study of Sacred Scripture and work with the serious research of scholars of other denominations. Bea also had an important part in the revision of the Vulgate Latin version of the Psalms, working from the difficult and incomplete Hebrew versions. Though it will now need some further revision, this Latin version which is now standard in the Roman breviary, was a pioneering effort in its time and in the long history of the use of scripture in the Church's liturgy. Through scripture studies, Bea developed his interest in cooperation and work with other Christian groups, the ecumenism for which he became so widely known. It was work like his, and other scholars in other fields, that paved the way for the Catholic Church's open commitment to the cause of Christian Unity which, for many

people seemed to come like something of a bombshell from the unpredictable ferment unleashed by Pope John when he called the 2nd Vatican Council. Both as a bible scholar and as an ecumenist, Cardinal Bea found himself up against a lot of opposition, which sometimes went to very extraordinary lengths indeed. But he was also a very clever, astute man - and there are some delightful stories of how he on occasion outwitted his opponents or achieved some objective he thought worthwhile. He was a quiet, determined man who didn't hesitate to make his mind known - perhaps ironically, it was through speaking his mind clearly that he was first brought to Rome and relieved, before his term of office was up, of his post as a religious superior in Germany in which capacity he'd written a critical letter to the Jesuit superior-general. It was his intelligence and urbanity which made the work of his <sup>Christian unity</sup> secretariat both possible and so successful. The greatest loss in his death will be to the movement in the Church he's become the inspiration and symbol of. Let us pray that other men of his stature, ability, <sup>deep spirituality,</sup> universal clarity, kindness and tact will join in the work he did so well, and forward the task of realizing Christ's prayer and the dying prayer of Bea's great friend Pope John: "That they may be one."