



The Holy See

FUNERAL MASS FOR CARDINAL
ANTONIO MARÍA JAVIERRE ORTAS, S.D.B.

HOMILY OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI

Altar of the Chair, St Peter's Basilica

Friday, 2 February 2007

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Yesterday, the day after the liturgical memorial of St John Bosco, a spiritual son of his, our beloved Cardinal Antonio María Javierre Ortas departed for Heaven. At the time of his departure, he was surrounded by the unanimous prayer for the repose of his soul that Salesians customarily raise for their deceased confreres and sisters on the very day after the Feast of their Founder.

Today, the Roman Curia, his friends and relatives join his Religious family on the day in which the liturgy commemorates the Presentation of the Lord at the temple.

The words of elderly Simeon as he clasped the Infant Jesus in his arms re-echo on this occasion with special emotion: "*Nunc dimittis servum tuum Domine, secundum verbum tuum in pace* - now let your servant depart in peace, according to your word" (Lk 2: 29). This is the prayer that the Church raises to God at nightfall and it is especially important to remember it today, thinking again of our Brother who has reached the end of his earthly life.

"*Misericordias Domini in aeternum cantabo*". Let us make our own these words from Cardinal Javierre Ortas' spiritual diary, as we accompany him on his journey to the Father's House.

He was born in Siétamo, in the Diocese of Huesca, on 21 February 1921. He was granted the gift of a long life, inspired from his youth by a pronounced missionary spirit. He would have liked, after the example of Don Bosco, to live out his vocation as a Salesian in direct contact with young people in a mission land but Providence summoned him to other offices.

Thus, he was an apostle in the university environment and in the milieu of the Roman Curia.

However, he never missed an opportunity to carry out his intense spiritual activity in the essentially theological sphere, as well as in the broader domain of culture, especially by directing groups of professors and Religious and as chaplain to university students.

His was a faithful and generous service to the Church, always willing and cordial. Despite his venerable age, his departure was somewhat unexpected. Impelled by faith, but also by affection for his venerable figure, we are now gathered round the altar of the Lord, preparing to offer the Eucharistic sacrifice for him.

Christ's words that we have just heard in the Gospel ring out: "I am the living bread which came down from heaven; if any one eats of this bread, he will live for ever; and the bread which I shall give for the life of the world is my flesh" (Jn 6: 51).

This is one of the sayings of Jesus that sums up the whole of his mystery. And it is comforting to listen to it and meditate upon it while we pray for a priestly soul who found in the Eucharist the centre of his life.

Intimate and persevering sacramental communion with the Body and Blood of Christ brings about a profound transformation of the person. The fruit of this inner process, which involves the whole person, is what the Apostle Paul wrote to the Philippians: "*Mihi vivere Christus est*" (Phil 1: 21).

Thus, to die is a "gain", because only by dying is it possible to achieve fully that "being-in-Christ" of which Eucharistic Communion is a pledge on this earth.

Yesterday, I had in my hands several letters that Cardinal Javierre had written to beloved John Paul II in which this privileged reference to the Eucharist appears.

In 1992, when he was appointed Prefect of the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, he wrote: "I repeat on this occasion my unconditional desire for service. Your Holiness, I am relying on my sincere efforts to bring to completion the task you have entrusted to me. I imagine it gravitating totally around the EUCHARIST", written in capitals. "Everything is attracted to this barycentre".

Then on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of his Priestly Ordination, he wrote in his letter thanking the Holy Father for his good wishes: "At the time of my ordination in Salamanca, the priesthood gravitated entirely around the Eucharist.... It is a joy to relive the sentiments of our ordination, aware that in the Eucharist, the Sacrament of his Sacrifice, Christ actualizes his one Priesthood to the full".

Our beloved late Cardinal is now joyfully participating in the Heavenly Banquet, the Messianic Feast mentioned by Isaiah in the First Reading, where death is swallowed up for ever and tears

wiped from every face (cf. Is 25: 8).

As we ourselves wait to take part in this eternal banquet of love, when the Lord pleases, we who are still pilgrims and he who has reached the goal are now brought together by the singing of the Responsorial Psalm that has resounded: "*Dominus pascit me, et nihil mihi deerit: in loco pascuae, ibi me collocavit*" (Ps 23[22]: 1-2). No, death does not frighten the person who lives in Christ; he experiences at every moment what the Psalmist says with trust: "*Nam et si ambulavero in valle umbrae mortis, non timebo mala, quoniam tu mecum es*" (23[22]: 4).

"*Tu mecum es*": these words refer to other words which the Risen Jesus addressed to the Apostles and which our Brother chose as his episcopal motto: "*Ego vobiscum sum*" (Mt 28: 20).

In fact, Cardinal Javierre Ortas desired his personal existence and his ecclesial mission to be a message of hope; through his apostolate, after the example of St John Bosco, he strove to communicate to all that Christ is continually with us.

He, a son of the homeland of St Teresa and of St John of the Cross, prayed so often in his heart: "Let no one upset you, no one frighten you. One who holds fast to God lacks nothing. God alone suffices".

It is precisely because he was accustomed to living supported by these convictions that Cardinal Javierre Ortas, at the time of his retirement from active ministry in the Curia, was able to write anew to the Pope words steeped in hope: "It only remains for me to implore the Lord, in divine tones, to treat his Vicar kindly when, in the evening of life - not far off - the hour of examination on love strikes".

The coat-of-arms of our late Brother features a boat moored to two pillars; the boat is the Church, the helmsman is the Pope and the two pillars are the Eucharist and Our Lady. As a worthy Son of Don Bosco, the Cardinal was deeply devoted to Mary, whom he loved and venerated with the title: "Help of Christians". He sought to imitate the style of discreet and generous service of Our Lady, "Ancilla Domini" [Handmaid of the Lord].

He left his office as Prefect of the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments "on tiptoe", to devote himself to the service which on the contrary one must never give up: prayer. And now that the Heavenly Father has desired to have the Cardinal beside him, I am certain that in Heaven - where we trust the Lord has welcomed him in his fatherly embrace - he continues to pray for us.

I would like to conclude with a reflection that leads us to the embrace of the Redeemer.

"It is marvellous", he wrote, "to think that the series of sins of our life does not matter, that it

suffices to raise our eyes and see the gesture of the Saviour, who welcomes us one by one with infinite kindness in an extremely loving way. In this perspective", he ended, "*the farewell is haloed with hope and joy*".

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