



The Holy See

FUNERAL MASS FOR CARDINAL PIO LAGHI

HOMILY OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI

Altar of the Chair, St Peter's Basilica

Tuesday, 13 January 2009

Your Eminences,

Venerable Brothers in the Episcopate and in the Priesthood,

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Gathered in prayer around the Lord's altar for the Eucharistic celebration, in the light of faith, we are paying our last respects on earth to beloved Cardinal Pio Laghi, whom the Lord has called to himself at the end of his days marked by serious illness. In his spiritual testament, dated 14 November last year, he wrote: "Once again I offer God my life for the Church, for the Holy Father and for the sanctification of my brothers in the priesthood. From this moment, I accept the death that Divine Providence has in store for me: all I ask is that the days of my suffering, may be shortened, if possible, so as not to cause those who must care for me too much inconvenience". And the Lord, to whose service he devoted his whole being, as a good and merciful Father, has now opened his arms to him. In the light of this hope, I address my deep condolences to all who are mourning his sorrowful departure: to his relatives, his friends and those who appreciated his human and priestly gifts. I especially join you in your prayers, dear brothers and sisters, who attended his funeral, at which Cardinal Angelo Sodano, Dean of the College of Cardinals, presided.

In the Gospel proclaimed at this celebration, the message of the Beatitudes resounded once again. The Lord Jesus, as he once did on that mountain in Galilee, continues to teach his disciples with these ever valid teachings that constitute as it were the "*Magna Carta*" of an authentic Christian life. How often beloved Cardinal Pio Laghi must have paused to meditate on these words of the Gospel and how often he explained them to the faithful! With their strong eschatological

charge, they sustain our hope in the Kingdom of Heaven, promised to all who strive to follow the Teacher's path faithfully, abiding by his teachings. God has created us for himself and in him we find happiness. By conforming to his Word we can transform into a fount of peace and a source of joy even the trials and suffering that are an inevitable part of our earthly pilgrimage. We pray that the Lord may enable our Brother to share in the eternal bliss, of whose first-fruits he already had a foretaste of here on earth, in ecclesial communion and in building bonds of peace and harmony between the peoples and nations in which he was posted as Papal Representative.

We may say that the entire priestly mission of Cardinal Pio Laghi was spent in the direct service of the Holy See. He always drew inspiration from the words that Jesus addressed to Peter on the occasion of the miraculous catch: "Master, we toiled all night and took nothing! But at your word I will let down the nets" *In verbo tuo laxabo rete*" (Lk 5: 5). Cardinal Laghi chose these words as the motto for his episcopal ministry. As he explained later this was because when he received episcopal ordination on 22 June 1969, the liturgy of that Sunday provided for the Gospel account of the miraculous catch. His coat of arms depicted among other things a lake above which a stretch of sky and an arm with a net can be seen. It was the crest of his family in which he received a sound human and Christian formation which in his spiritual testament he describes as "Christian, Catholic, hardworking and honest". In the heart of his family he nourished the seed of a priestly vocation. After his elementary and secondary studies at the local Salesian Institute at Faenza, he entered the diocesan seminary to study philosophy which he continued later, together with theological courses, in Rome as a student at the Pontifical Major Seminary, until he was ordained a priest on 20 April 1946.

He was then summoned to serve the Holy See and in March 1952, after earning degrees in theology and in canon law at the Pontifical Lateran University, he embarked on his long diplomatic and pastoral career in the Nunciatures of various nations: from Nicaragua to Washington in the U.S.A., to New Delhi in India, from which he subsequently returned to work for five years at the Secretariat of State. After his appointment as titular Archbishop of Mauriana in May 1969, the Pope named him as his Delegate in Jerusalem and in Palestine, as well as charging him with the office of Pro-Nuncio in Cyprus and Apostolic Visitor for Greece. In April 1974, he became Apostolic Nuncio in Argentina where he remained until December 1980, when he was called to take on the mission of Apostolic Delegate in the United States. It was precisely during these years that official relations were established between the Holy See and the Government in Washington.

Cardinal Laghi's long experience and knowledge of the Church prompted my beloved Predecessor [John Paul II](#) to choose him as Prefect of the [Congregation for Catholic Education](#) and to create him a Cardinal at the Consistory on 28 June 1991 and also from May 1993 to invest him with the lofty role of Patron of the Sovereign Military Order of Malta. It is likewise only right to recall with gratitude the special missions that were entrusted to the late Cardinal: in May 2001, to Israel and to the Palestinian Authority, to deliver an autograph Papal Message in order to encourage both parties to call for an immediate cease fire and the resumption of dialogue. Two years later, on 1

March 2003, he was charged to go as Special Envoy to Washington to present a Papal Message to the President of the United States and to explain the position and initiatives undertaken by the Holy See to contribute to disarmament and peace in the Middle East. These were delicate missions which he endeavoured to carry out, as always, with faithful dedication to Christ and to his Church. "I have desired to love Christ", he wrote in his spiritual testament, "and to serve him all my life, although my human frailty has often prevented me from expressing to him my love, fidelity and total dedication to his will in as edifying a way as I would have wished".

Let us thank God for the gift of this Brother and friend of ours, and for all the good that with the help of divine grace he was able to carry out in the various milieus in which he was called to perform his invaluable pastoral and diplomatic service. The zeal he devoted to vocations promotion and to the formation of priests deserves special mention. Let us trust that he may now contemplate face to face, that Jesus whom he tried so much to love and serve in his brethren (cf. 1 Jn 3: 2). At the moment when we are taking our leave of him, may our hearts be uplifted by the firm hope that the hope that illuminated the priestly and apostolic life of Cardinal Pio Laghi may be "full of immortality" (cf. Wis 3: 4), as today's liturgy has reminded us, and that it may now find complete and definitive fulfilment in the divine invitation to partake of the banquet in Heaven. As the conclusion of his spiritual testament, the Cardinal expressed this hope: "With the sweet name of Mary on my lips and the adorable name of her divine Son Jesus, I breathe my last". Let us accompany him with fraternal affection in the passage from time to eternity, uniting ourselves with him in a prayer that he particularly liked to repeat: "*Jesu, filii Dei et Mariae, miserere mei: Mater mea, Fiducia mea, ora pro me in hora mortis meae. Amen*".

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