



The Holy See

FUNERAL MASS FOR CARDINAL ANGELO FELICI

HOMILY OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI

Altar of the Chair, St Peter's Basilica

Tuesday, 19 June 2007

We have just heard in the Gospel these words spoken by Christ: *"He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day"* (Jn 6: 54).

They illumine our faith and support our hope at the sad and solemn moment when, gathered round the altar with sentiments of affection and fervent gratitude, we are preparing to say our last farewell to our venerable Brother, Cardinal Angelo Felici.

Let us profess with special intensity, with him and for him, the awareness that in the Eucharist we are mysteriously enabled to share in the Lord's death and Resurrection, in the firm belief that God prepares for his good and faithful servants the reward of life without end.

This is the faith which guided the long and fruitful priestly life of Cardinal Felici. With this faith, he celebrated the divine Sacrifice, seeking in the Eucharist the constant reference for his spiritual journey. With this faith he drew from the Eucharist the strength to carry out his zealous work in the Lord's vineyard! We are now confident that the Father has welcomed him into his house to participate in the heavenly banquet.

Gathered round the Altar, let us pray that this brother of ours in the priesthood may see face to face Jesus Christ his Lord (cf. I Cor 13: 12), whom he strove to serve on earth with love.

At this time, the Apostle John's exhortation meaningfully rings out in our soul: *"By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for our brethren"* (I Jn 3: 16).

We might say that these words effectively sum up the profound intention that gave the late Cardinal's life and ecclesial ministry its direction.

Born in the ancient and noble city of Segni, the teenage Angelo Felici responded promptly to the Lord's call and was welcomed into the Pontifical Leonian College at Anagni, where he studied philosophy and theology. Having received the Sub-Diaconate, he was immediately directed to the Pontifical Ecclesiastical Academy, and on 4 April 1942, when he was not yet 23, he was ordained to the priesthood.

He then continued his academic training in the juridical sector: he took courses *utriusque iuris* at the Lateran Athenaeum and then switched to the Gregorian University, where he earned a Doctorate in Canon Law.

In practice, his priesthood was to be dedicated entirely to serving the Holy See, in close collaboration with the Successor of Peter. Indeed, on 1 July 1945 he entered the Secretariat of State, where he acquired considerable experience regarding the Holy See's relations with States. At first he worked with Cardinal Tardini, and then with Cardinal Cicognani.

Because of his competence and proven fidelity, the Servant of God Paul VI appointed him Undersecretary of what was then known as the *Sacred Congregation for Extraordinary Ecclesiastical Affairs*. In that same period, he combined his service to the Holy See with teaching the diplomatic style to students at the Pontifical Ecclesiastical Academy. In July 1967, he was appointed Archbishop and sent as Pro-Apostolic Nuncio to The Netherlands. He remained there for nine years.

In 1976, he became the Papal Representative in Portugal after spending three years in Paris, where he was destined to welcome beloved John Paul II three times on the occasion of his Apostolic Pilgrimages to France.

He was recalled to Rome in 1988 and created a Cardinal with the Title of "Santi Biagio e Carlo ai Catinari", to become the Prefect of the Congregation for the Causes of Saints. The dear and venerable Cardinal Felici carried out this service until 1995, when he was subsequently President of the Pontifical Commission "Ecclesia Dei" until the year 2000.

I am pleased to refer now to what the Servant of God John Paul II wrote to him on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of his priestly ordination and 25th anniversary of episcopal ordination, highlighting the scrupulous sense of duty which distinguished him and his prompt execution of orders in addressing the problems and public affairs of the universal Church.

His episcopal ministry, the Pope said, was totally dedicated to the good of the faithful, to the benefit of the Roman Pontiff's mission and to the Apostolic See.

Let us now thank the Lord for the abundant harvest of apostolic fruit which, with the help of divine grace, he was able to gather in the various areas of his enlightened and precious pastoral and diplomatic activity. Let us ask the Good Shepherd that, in recognizing the love with which the late Cardinal worked throughout his long earthly life, he will graciously admit him to contemplate the radiant light of his glorious Face.

In the meantime, as we prepare to offer to this venerable Brother of ours our last farewell, may the words of the Book of Wisdom, just proclaimed, revive in our hearts the light of faith in the God of life: *"The souls of the righteous are in the hands of God"* (3: 1).

Yes, the souls of God's friends rest in the peace of his heart. May this certainty which we must always nourish be a constant reminder to us to watch and pray and to persevere humbly and faithfully in our work of serving the Church. The souls of the just find repose in God alone; only those who trust in him will not be lost for ever, *"In Te, Domine, speravi, non confundar in aeternum"*.

There is no doubt that the late Cardinal Angelo Felici expected death and prepared for it with just such a spirit and awareness. A moving testimony of this was found among his papers. On the back of a little image of the *Mater Salvatoris*, venerated in the Chapel of the Pontifical Leonian College - where he had studied as a young man - is written: *"In you, Lord, have I hoped, and in your Most Holy Mother: may I not be lost for ever"*.

How often did he repeat the words of this prayer written in his own hand in preparation for the final departure!

We may consider them the spiritual testament which he has bequeathed to us: they are words which better than any other comment help us to reflect and pray today.

Cardinal Angelo Felici entrusted his life and his death to the Mother of the Saviour, and it is precisely to her that we wish to consign his soul.

May Mary, whom our Brother loved and called upon as a tender and caring Mother, now receive him in her arms as a most beloved son and accompany him to the encounter with Christ, with the One who "calls us back to life in company with Christ, whose victory is our redemption" (Preface, Christian Death, V). Amen!

Copyright © Dicastero per la Comunicazione - Libreria Editrice Vaticana