



The Holy See

FUNERAL MASS FOR CARDINAL AGOSTINO CASAROLI

HOMILY OF JOHN PAUL II

Friday, 12 June 1998

1. *“Ego resuscitabo eum in novissimo die”* (Jn 6:54) — “I will raise him up at the last day”.

These words of the Lord Jesus reverberate with particular eloquence today in St Peter’s Basilica, which sees us gathered here in sorrow and hope for the funeral of our Venerable Brother, Cardinal Agostino Casaroli, called by the Father in the middle of the night last Tuesday.

Divine Providence willed that his funeral should take place on the day after the Solemnity of *Corpus Christi*, when the Church adores the great mystery of the Eucharist, the sacrament of the dead and risen Christ, the bread of immortal life. John’s text on the “bread of life” has been opened for us like a shining beacon at this moment of grief. “I am the bread of life ... and the bread which I shall give for the life of the world is my flesh.... He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day” (Jn 6:48, 51, 54).

What deep comfort these words give us today, as we gaze at the coffin of our dear Secretary of State emeritus: what deep consolation at the thought that he was, and will always be, a priest of Christ, a minister of the bread of life! Every day he was nourished with the Sacrament to which the Lord linked the pledge of resurrection. And every day, for over 60 years, he distributed it to the People of God. Christ’s flesh was given for the life of the world, the Evangelist John reminds us (cf. 6:51), and this recalls the mission of the priest, who is “in the Church for the world”, as the title says of the book containing the homilies and addresses given by the late Cardinal Casaroli during his long and meritorious work as a zealous pastor and distinguished diplomat.

2. *“Rogate quae ad pacem sunt Ierusalem”* — “Pray for the peace of Jerusalem! ... For my brethren and companions’ sake I will say, ‘Peace be within you!’”. *“Pax in te!”* (Ps 121 [122]:6, 8).

The work of peace! At this time I am pleased to remember our departed Brother as a wise servant of that peace which is

the historical expression of the eschatological gift left by Christ to his Church. How can we not recognize and see in him an authentic “peacemaker”, a shining example of those artisans of the “*opus iustitiae*” whom Jesus calls “blessed ... for they shall be called sons of God” (Mt 5:9)?

On his 70th birthday, he wanted to open his heart and reveal the guiding principles of the ecclesial service he rendered in the heart of the Holy See. Among them he included a “deep love for the cause of peace and co-operation between nations and within them, sustained by the conviction that it is a question of moral imperatives and a necessity, especially today, for the very survival of mankind” (Agostino Casaroli, *Nella Chiesa per il mondo*, Milan 1987, p. 494).

He always sought this peace — as the psalm says — particularly “for Jerusalem”, that is, *for the Church*. Cardinal Casaroli had countless conversations and meetings with representatives of States and national and international organizations, first as Undersecretary and then as Secretary of the Congregation for Extraordinary Ecclesiastical Affairs, which later became the Section for Relations with States, and eventually as Secretary of State. His constant concern was *the defence of the Church’s freedom* in fulfilling the mission entrusted to her by the Redeemer. The contacts he made in difficult times with regimes in the communist world should be interpreted in this light; his intention was to ensure the permanence of lawful ecclesial structures in those countries. The chief goal inspiring his action was *the good of souls*, particularly of the great number of Catholics who had remained faithful to the Church but were in grave danger of gradual dechristianization.

In these sensitive tasks, he was able to give effective and creative expression to that *principle of dialogue* so dear to the Servant of God Pope Paul VI, whose close collaborator he was, after having worked faithfully with the revered Pontiffs, the Servants of God Pius XII and John XXIII. “Dialogue”, he himself said, “is the high road and supreme method, not only for serving peace, but also for encouraging the effectiveness and success of diplomatic activity”; authentic dialogue, which is “firm in asserting the truth and in defending the right, and respectful towards individuals” (*ibid.*).

With this service, always motivated by a keen ecclesial spirit, he made an important contribution, acknowledged by all, to the cause of truth and freedom in difficult times for the Church and for humanity. I had the joy of seeing his wise and patient efforts crowned with the opening of the new historical phase signaled by the events of 1989.

3. A few months after the start of my Pontificate, I called Archbishop Casaroli to my side as Secretary of State and shortly afterwards created him a Cardinal. For many years, until he completed his mandate in December 1990, I was able to observe with admiration and be the first to benefit from his loyalty and the variety of his human, pastoral and diplomatic gifts.

During my visit 10 years ago to the Diocese of Piacenza, I wanted to go to Castel San Giovanni, his native town, and to enter the parish church where he was baptized, confirmed and ordained a priest. At this time I would like to extend my thoughts and deepest sympathy to his relatives and to his many friends and acquaintances from his native land. But above all, as I did on that happy occasion (cf. *Insegnamenti XI*, 2 [1988], 1809), I wish to offer my thanks to the Holy Spirit for having given him to the Church in the direct service of the Apostolic See.

I would also like to mention another lesser known, but very edifying aspect of his personality. Although engaged in

matters of great importance for the Church and for international relations, since 1943 he constantly devoted himself to pastoral work at the juvenile rehabilitation centre of Casal del Marmo in Rome. He had a close relationship of mutual trust with those young people and their families: they called him informally “Fr Agostino”. Thus he combined his demanding work as a pastor and diplomat with concrete contact with people, especially with “his boys”, who were able to see him for the last time about 10 days ago.

“May they prosper who love you” (Ps 121:6): it is consoling — as the responsorial psalm wishes — to think that the prayers of so many people, who have drawn comfort and hope from his priesthood, are joined to ours today and rise pleasingly to the heavenly Father for the repose of his soul.

4. We trust that the infinitely good and merciful God will welcome into his peace our revered Brother, who leaves us the witness of his human, Christian and priestly virtues, for which we can never forget him.

He who, according to the words of the Apostle Peter we heard a few moments ago, “has given us new birth to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and to an inheritance which is imperishable, undefiled and unfading” (1 Pt 1:3-4), will not fail to bring him into that kingdom for which he dedicated his entire life.

We have been given a sure sign of this hope in Mary most holy, joined to the mystery of the Redeemer and taken up into glory. To her, the Mother and Queen of Apostles, we entrust the soul of Cardinal Agostino Casaroli, so that he may attain in the fullness of joy and peace the goal of his faith (cf. 1 Pt 1:9).

All of us, who are bidding this last farewell to our unforgettable Brother, are invited to lift up our gaze, to renew our faith in the resurrection. In our spirit re-echo the words of God in the book of the prophet Ezekiel: *“Behold, I will open your graves and raise you from your graves.... And I will put my Spirit within you, and you shall live, and I will place you in your own land; then you shall know that I, the Lord, have spoken, and I have done it, says the Lord”* (Ez 37:12, 14).

Amen!

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