



The Holy See

FUNERAL MASS FOR CARDINAL ALBERTO BOVONE

HOMILY OF JOHN PAUL II

Monday, 20 April 1998

1. "*Pater, in manus tuas commendo spiritum meum*" (Lk 23:46).

Jesus' words, his last prayer on the Cross to the Father, guide us in meditation and prayer as we are gathered here in the Vatican Basilica to celebrate the funeral Mass of our Venerable Brother, Cardinal Alberto Bovone, who died last Friday. Created a Cardinal on the eve of the Lenten season, he left for the heavenly Jerusalem after a painful illness, towards the end of the Octave of Easter, in anticipation of the unending day of eternity.

He experienced his last Easter as a Cardinal and Providence immediately asked of him the ultimate witness, so that the genuineness of his faith - according to the Apostle Peter's words - might redound to his praise, glory and honour at the revelation of Jesus Christ (cf. 1 Pt 1:7).

The Easter mystery fully conformed him to his Lord, for whom he gave his life as a concerned and good Pastor, loving to the very end the Church and those in her entrusted to his care.

2. Jesus' last breath on the cross opens the way to an immense hope for every person who comes into this world and leaves it. "He breathed his last", notes the Evangelist Luke (Lk 23:46; cf. Jn 19:30). Christ's last breath is the centre of history, which, by virtue of this last breath, is salvation history.

In Jesus' death on the cross, God gave himself entirely to humanity, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and conquered sin and death. That human breath which exhausted itself was the sacrament of the inexhaustible Spirit of life, who on the third day raised the Son of Man, "the faithful witness", making him "the first-born of the dead" (Rv 1:5).

Whoever dies in the Lord is "blessed henceforth" (Rv 14:13), because he joins his last breath with that of Christ, in the sure hope that "he who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus and bring us ... into his presence" (2 Cor 4:14).

3. "*Beati mortui qui in Domino moriuntur*" (Rv 14:13). Sacred Scripture reminds us that in order to *die in the Lord* we must *live in the Lord*, entrusting ourselves each day to his grace, moment by moment, and striving with all our might to conform to it.

To live in the Lord! How can we not thank God at this moment when our hearts are suffering over the loss of our Venerable Brother, over *the witness of fidelity* he has left us? During his life he offered us a shining example of docilely following Christ. Yes, this Eucharist we are celebrating together is primarily a thanksgiving for the gift of a Christian and a Pastor who built up the Church with great discretion in the various tasks entrusted to him, especially in the Roman Curia.

4. In fact, it was precisely in the Curia that he began his service in 1951, continuing it without interruption until his death. His profound and balanced spiritual, apostolic and doctrinal formation, and even more his virtues of faithful diligence and sincere openness, as well as his wisdom, enabled him to offer valuable assistance for many years, first in the Congregation for the Council, which later became the Congregation for the Clergy, and then in the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, of which I myself appointed him Secretary in 1984, raising him to the dignity of Archbishop. For 11 years he was a very capable collaborator of Cardinal Ratzinger, who consecrated him a Bishop and always regarded him with fraternal affection.

He ended his service to the Apostolic See as Prefect of the Congregation for the Causes of Saints, an important dicastery for the life of the Church, whose essential purpose is to live and testify to God's holiness at every moment. I am sure that today his devotion to the Gospel and his yearning for holiness, which he was given the opportunity to intensify by examining the lives of so many servants of God and blessed in his special ministry during this last period, find that fulfilment with the Father for which every baptized person constantly hopes. Now the blessed and saints whom he helped to make known here on earth can come to meet him and lead him into the joy of paradise.

5. We wish to pray for this together, recognizing that despite the human imperfections always present in the life of those who are pilgrims here below, our Venerable Brother Cardinal Bovone was a priest with a crystal clear faith, nourished by constant prayer. A strong spirituality, rooted in his family, parish and seminary education, sustained him in the faithful exercise of the priestly ministry, enabling him to achieve an admirable balance between his curial tasks and pastoral activity.

This wealth of gifts from the Lord, which he made so fruitful during his earthly pilgrimage, calls to mind the spices which the women, disciples of Jesus, took with them, as the Evangelist says, when they went to the tomb at daybreak (cf. Lk 24:1).

6. However, dear Cardinal Bovone himself, with his characteristic modesty pervaded by a witty sense of humour, invites us not to dwell on his person but to turn our gaze to the mystery: "Why do

you seek the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen" (Lk 24:5). He invites us - as a baptized person, as a Pastor, as a Cardinal - the day after the Octave of Easter, this "day the Lord has made", to make our own the words of the Apostle Peter: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! By his great mercy we have been born anew 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).

Our life is in the Lord's hands, always, at every instant, especially at the moment of death. "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit". For this reason our late Brother asks us to accompany him with our prayer as he journeys from this world to the Father.

Sustained by the maternal intercession of Mary most holy, may he "as the outcome of his faith obtain the salvation of his soul" (cf. 1 Pt 1:9). May he "rejoice with unutterable and exalted joy" (cf. 1 Pt 1:8), contemplating finally and for ever the One whom he loved on earth without seeing him: Jesus Christ, our Lord, to whom be praise and glory for ever and ever.

Amen.

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