



The Holy See

HOLY MASS FOR THE FUNERAL OF
CARDINAL ALFONSO LÓPEZ TRUJILLO
HOMILY OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI

Vatican Basilica

Wednesday, 23 April 2008

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

"Unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit" (Jn 12: 24). The Evangelist John thus foretold the glorification of Christ through the mystery of his death on the Cross. In this Easter Season, in the light of the mystery of the Resurrection itself, these words acquire an even deeper and more incisive eloquence. If it is true that a certain sorrow can be detected in them because of his imminent departure from his disciples, it is also true that Jesus pointed to the secret for defeating the power of death. Death does not have the last word, it is not the end of everything but, redeemed by the sacrifice of the Cross, it can henceforth be the passage to the joy of life without end. Jesus said, "He who loves his life loses it, and he who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life" (Jn 12: 25). Thus, if we can die to our selfishness, if we refuse to withdraw into ourselves and make our life a gift to God and to our brethren, we too will be able to know the rich fruitfulness of love. And love does not die.

Here is the renewed message of hope that we gather from God's Word today, as we say our last farewell to our beloved Brother, Cardinal Alfonso López Trujillo. His death, which came just as he seemed to have recovered from a severe health crisis that began more than a year ago, has deeply distressed us all. In the United States, where I was on a Pastoral Visit, I immediately raised to God a prayer of suffrage for his soul and now, at the end of Holy Mass at which Cardinal Angelo Sodano, Dean of the College of Cardinals, has presided, I join you all with affection to recall the great generosity with which the late Cardinal served the Church and to thank the Lord for the many gifts with which he enriched the person and the ministry of our late Brother.

At the Consistory of 2 February 1983 Archbishop Alfonso López Trujillo was the youngest Cardinal on whom my Venerable Predecessor, Pope John Paul II, conferred a Cardinal's hat. He was born in Villahermosa in the Diocese of Ibagué, Colombia, in 1935, and while still a child moved with his family to the capital, Bogotá. Here, when he was a university student, he entered the Major Seminary. He continued his studies in Rome and was ordained a priest in November 1960. Having concluded his theological formation, he taught philosophy at the archdiocesan seminary and worked for many years at the service of the entire Church in Colombia. In 1971, the Servant of God Paul VI appointed him Auxiliary Bishop of Bogotá; in those same years he was also President of the Doctrinal Commission of the Colombian Bishops' Conference and was chosen shortly afterwards as Secretary General of CELAM, an office he carried out with recognized competence over a long period.

In 1978, again by Paul VI, he was entrusted with the office of Coadjutor Bishop of the Archdiocese of Medellín with the right of succession, and he later became its Pastor. His deep knowledge of the ecclesial situation in Latin America acquired during the long period in which he had worked as Secretary of CELAM led to his appointment as President of this important ecclesial body, which he directed wisely from 1979 to 1983. From 1987 to 1990 he was President of the Colombian Bishops' Conference. He also had opportunities to broaden his knowledge of the universal Church's problems, having taken part in the three Assemblies of the Synod of Bishops held in the Vatican: in 1974 on evangelization, in 1977 on catechesis and in 1980 on the family. Moreover, it was precisely to the family that he was called to be especially dedicated, from 8 November 1990 when John Paul II appointed him President of the [Pontifical Council for the Family](#), an office that kept him in active service until the moment of his death.

On this occasion, how is it possible not to highlight the zeal and enthusiasm with which he worked during these approximately 18 years, carrying out a tireless activity to safeguard and promote the family and Christian marriage? How can we fail to thank him for the courage with which he defended the non-negotiable values of human life? We have all admired his indefatigable activity. One result of his hard work is the *Lexicon*, which constitutes a precious text for the formation of pastoral workers and an instrument for dialogue with the contemporary world on the basic themes of Christian ethics. We can only be grateful to him for the tenacious battle he fought in defence of the "truth", family love and to spread the "Gospel of the family". The enthusiasm and determination with which he worked in this field were the fruit of his personal experience, linked in particular with the suffering his mother had to bear; she died at the age of 44 from a very painful illness. "When in my work", he remarked, "I speak of the ideals of marriage and the family, it comes naturally to me to think of the family from which I come, because through my parents I have been able to understand how it is possible to fulfil both ideals".

The late Cardinal drew his love for the truth about man and for the Gospel of the family from the thought that every human being and every family reflect the mystery of God who is Love. His moving address to the Assembly of the Synod of Bishops in 1997 lives on, impressed in the minds

of all: it was a true hymn to life. He presented a very practical spirituality to those who are involved in the implementation of the divine plan for the family. He emphasized that if knowledge does not concentrate on understanding and educating to life, it will lose the most crucial battle on the fascinating and mysterious ground of genetic engineering.

If Cardinal López Trujillo made the defence of and love for the family the characteristic commitment of his service in the Pontifical Council of which he was President, it was to the affirmation of the truth that he dedicated his whole life. He testifies to this in one of his writings in which he explains: "I have personally chosen the motto '*Veritas in Caritate*', because all that concerns the truth is at the heart of my studies". And he added that truth in love has always been an "existential pole" for him, at first in Colombia, when he strove "to find the meaning of genuine liberation in the theological context", and later on, here in Rome, when he devoted himself "to deepening, proclaiming and spreading the Gospel of life and the Gospel of the family, as a collaborator of the Holy Father". He concluded: "I deeply believe in the value of this decisive battle for the Church and for humanity and I ask the Lord to give me the strength to be neither lazy nor cowardly".

To bring to completion the mission that Jesus entrusts to us, we must not be lazy or cowardly. In the Second Reading we heard how the Apostle Paul, a prisoner in Rome, urged his trusted disciple Timothy to take heart and to persevere in witnessing to Christ, even at the cost of being subjected to harsh persecution, ever strong in the certainty that: "if we have died with him, we shall also live with him; if we endure, we shall also reign with him" (II Tm 2: 11-12). May the late Cardinal's generosity, expressed in a multitude of charitable actions, especially for children in different parts of the world, be an encouragement to us to spend our physical and spiritual resources for the Gospel; may they spur us to work in defence of human life; help us to look constantly to the destination of our earthly pilgrimage. And St John points out to us what this comforting destination is, offering for our contemplation in the passage of Revelation which has just been proclaimed the visions of a "new Heaven" and a "new earth" (21: 1), and sketching before our eyes the prophetic lines of the "holy city", the "new Jerusalem... prepared as a bride adorned for her husband" (21: 2).

Venerable Brothers and dear friends, let us never lift our eyes from this vision: let us look to eternity, anticipating, even among trials and tribulations, the joy of the future "dwelling place of God with men", where our Redeemer will wipe away our every tear and where "death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain any more, for the former things have passed away" (cf. Rv 21: 4). We like to think that beloved Cardinal Alfonso López Trujillo, for whom we still desire to pray, has already reached this dwelling place of light and joy. May Mary welcome him and may the angels and saints in Paradise accompany him: may his soul athirst for God at last be able to enter and to rest in peace for ever in the "shrine" of infinite Love. Amen!

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