



The Holy See

FUNERAL MASS FOR CARDINAL ANTONIO INNOCENTI

HOMILY OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI

St Peter's Basilica

Wednesday, 10 September 2008

Your Eminences,

Venerable Brothers in the Episcopate and in the Priesthood,

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

You have gathered around the altar of the Lord to accompany with the celebration of the Eucharistic Sacrifice, in which the Paschal Mystery is relived, dear Cardinal Antonio Innocenti on his last journey. In addressing my cordial greeting to each one of you, I thank in particular Cardinal Sodano who, as Dean of the College of Cardinals, has presided at the holy Funeral Mass. We all remember our late Brother with affection, and this makes our prayers even more fervent and heartfelt. Above all, we are enlivened by faith in the Risen Lord, who is the source of eternal life for those who believe in him and follow him with love.

The dear Deceased has had a long life, spent serving the Lord; already in the early years of his adolescence he set out to follow Jesus, entering the Diocesan Seminary at Fiesole. We like to think of him in the light of the beautiful words of Sirach, contained in the beginning of the First Reading: "My son, if you come forward to serve the Lord, prepare yourself for temptation. Set your heart right and be steadfast, and do not be hasty in time of calamity" (Sir 2: 1-2). As it was for Jesus and is for all who are called to follow him more closely, the whole of life becomes a spiritual combat that is sustained and won by responding generously and joyfully to God's grace and his unswerving fidelity. "Trust in him and he will help you" (Sir 2: 6). Sirach exhorts us; and further: "You who fear the Lord, wait for his mercy" (2: 7). But at the same time he also suggests a mindset informed by wisdom: "Accept whatever is brought upon you, and in changes that humble you be patient. For gold is tested in the fire, and acceptable men in the furnace of humiliation" (Sir 2: 4-5). Faith and wisdom of life, closely interwoven, characterize the style of the Lord's disciple and in particular of his ordained minister, to the point of reaching that full conformation of which the

Apostle Paul confessed himself: "*Mihi vivere Christus est*" (Phil 1: 21). With the extraordinary conciseness that the Holy Spirit inspired in him, St Paul summarizes in these words the perfect form of Christian living: it is being with Jesus, being in him to the point that this communion flows over the threshold of separation between earthly life and the hereafter so that the death of the body is no longer loss but "gain" (*ibid.*).

This naturally concerns a goal that, in a certain way, always lies ahead of us but that we, like the Apostle, can nevertheless already anticipate in this life, especially through the Sacrament of the Eucharist, a real bond of communion with Christ in his death and Resurrection. If the Eucharist becomes the form of our existence, then for us to live is truly Christ and to die is equivalent to passing fully to him and to Trinitarian life in God, where we will also be in full communion with our brethren. "He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him... he who eats this bread will live for ever" (Jn 6: 56, 58). The words of the Lord Jesus that resonate in this liturgy are the light of faith and hope and give our prayers of suffrage a solid and sound foundation - the foundation upon which Cardinal Innocenti built his life.

A native of Poppi, in the Diocese of Fiesole and the Province of Arezzo, he received priestly Ordination in 1938 and, after an important pastoral experience in the world of work, was sent to Rome to specialize in theology and law. Upon returning to his diocese, he taught at the Seminary and assisted the Bishop on his pastoral visits during the Second World War. In that dramatic period, he distinguished himself by his self-denial and generosity in helping people and saving those who were destined to be deported. For this he was arrested and condemned to be shot, but when he stood before the firing squad the order was revoked. After the war he completed his theological studies in Rome and the then Substitute of the Secretariat of State, Archbishop Giovanni Battista Montini, asked him to attend the Pontifical Ecclesiastical Academy. So it was that he entered the Holy See's diplomatic service. He had the opportunity to become acquainted with various countries in Africa, Europe and the Near East, without ever forgetting his profound and genuine priestly inspiration, doing his utmost for his brethren and instilling courage and fostering faith and Christian hope in all.

Appointed Papal Representative in Paraguay, he was ordained a Bishop in 1968. He was then recalled to Rome, to take up the office of Secretary at the Congregation for the Sacraments and Divine Worship. Subsequently, in 1980, he was sent to Spain as Apostolic Nuncio, where he twice welcomed my venerable Predecessor John Paul ii on his Pastoral Visits. John Paul ii created him a Cardinal in May 1985 and from that moment our late Brother was even more deeply integrated into the life of the Church in Rome. In a new and more senior capacity he continued to offer his appreciated collaboration to the Supreme Pontiff, as Prefect of the Congregation for the Clergy, as President of the Pontifical Commission for the Cultural Heritage of the Church and of the Pontifical Commission "Ecclesia Dei".

I would like to end this brief reflection by referring to Cardinal Antonio Innocenti's episcopal motto:

"Lucem spero fide". These are particularly appropriate words at this moment; words which, as he confided to people who were close to him, he had always carried in his heart since, when he was an adolescent, he had received the gift of his priestly vocation. Now that he has crossed the last threshold, let us pray that his faith and hope may give way to the reality that is "the greatest of these", love that "never ends" (1 Cor 13: 8, 13). Let us give thanks for the gift of having known him and for all the benefits which the Lord has lavished upon his holy Church, in him and through him. While we invoke the motherly intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary for this Brother of ours, let us entrust his chosen soul to the Father of life, so that he may welcome him into his Kingdom of light and peace.

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