



The Holy See

FUNERAL MASS FOR CARDINAL GIUSEPPE CAPRIO

HOMILY OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI

Altar of the Chair, St Peter's Basilica

Tuesday, 18 October 2005

"Do not let your hearts be troubled... I [am] going to prepare a place for you" (Jn 14: 1-2).

The words of the Lord Jesus enlighten and comfort us, dear and venerable Brothers, at this time of sorrowful prayer as we gather round the mortal remains of the late Cardinal Giuseppe Caprio, to whom we are offering our last farewell.

He left us last Saturday, at the end of a long earthly pilgrimage that led him from a little village in Irpinia to various parts of the world and especially here to Rome, to serve the Holy See for which he spent his life.

In his testament we find the serene trust that Christ invites his disciples to make their own. At the very beginning the Cardinal wrote: "I thank the Most Blessed Trinity for having created and redeemed me and for causing me to be born into a family poor in material means but rich in Christian virtue, which, from the earliest years of my childhood, taught me to love God and to obey his holy law".

"I thank the Most Blessed Trinity...". Do not these words sum up, as it were, a Christian's life? At the end of the earthly day, the soul recollects in an attitude of intimate and moved gratitude, recognizing everything as a gift and preparing for the definitive embrace with God-Love.

This is the same sentiment as the intimate trust in the Lord mentioned in the first reading from the Book of Sirach: "You who fear the Lord, wait for his mercy... trust him... hope for good things, for lasting joy and mercy" (2: 7-9). Fear of the Lord is the beginning and fullness of wisdom (cf. Sir

1: 12, 14).

From this flows peace (cf. *Sir* 1: 16), a synonym in turn for that complete, eternal happiness that is a fruit of divine mercy. Whoever lives in holy fear of the Lord finds true peace and, as Sirach says further, "even on the day of his death... will be blessed" (1: 11). May God in his mercy forgive any possible sin of beloved Cardinal Caprio and welcome him into his kingdom of light and peace, for this brother of ours sought to serve holy Church faithfully.

"My son, when you come to serve the Lord... cling to him, forsake him not; thus will your future be great" (*Sir* 2: 1, 3). The young Giuseppe Caprio, who came from Lapio, presented himself at the Seminary of Benevento to serve the Lord. There he began his studies which he continued in Rome at the Gregorian University, where he obtained a licence in theology and a doctorate in canon law. In 1938 he was ordained a priest.

We read in his testament: *"I thank [God] with my heart full of emotion and gratitude for having called me to the priesthood"*. We too, in our prayer, join in his thanksgiving as we pray, preparing to offer for his soul the Eucharistic sacrifice, the centre and form of priestly life. I like to think, especially during these days when the whole Church is as it were focused on the Eucharistic mystery, that precisely there, on the altar, Cardinal Caprio's life and ministry - the various posts to which the diplomatic service of the Holy See took him - would have found their deepest point of convergence.

He went from Rome to Nanking, Brussels, Saigon, Taipei, New Delhi, and lastly, back to Rome. The presence of the Risen Christ was certainly his comfort in his most difficult moments, such as, in particular, the period he spent under house arrest in the Nunciature at Nanking in 1951, and the subsequent order to leave China.

In his testament he notes: *"I raise my grateful and devout thoughts to the Supreme Pontiff, who granted me the distinguished honour of representing him in so many countries, and whom I have always served with fidelity and filial love"*.

Might it not have been from the Eucharist that Cardinal Caprio was able to draw the spiritual energy to accept the mission entrusted to him by his superiors day after day, and to carry it out with love to the very end?

"Pax in virtute": the late Cardinal Caprio chose this motto when, in 1961, Bl. Pope John XXIII appointed him Archbishop. After taking part in the Second Vatican Council, he spent another brief period as Pro-Nuncio in India, and then returned to Rome to serve the Apostolic See directly in important offices, such as Substitute of the Secretariat of State and President of the Administration of the Patrimony.

His global view of the Church's problems and his constant concern to consider the administrative aspects in relation to superior interests, totally faithful to the Spirit of the Council, received recognition.

"Christ is now raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep" (I Cor 15: 20). The light of the Risen Jesus illuminates the shadows of death, the "last enemy" (I Cor 15: 26), to which we must pay the due contracted with original sin but which no longer holds sway over believers, for the Lord has conquered it once and for all.

In Christ all will receive life; each one in proper order: first Christ, who is the first fruits; then, at his coming, all those who belong to him (cf. I Cor 15: 22-23).

The liturgy applies this Pauline passage to the Virgin Mary on the Solemnity of her Assumption into Heaven. I am pleased to witness here to Cardinal Giuseppe Caprio's Marian devotion, as it stands out in his testament: *"I entrust my soul", he wrote, "to the Virgin Most Holy of Pompei, so that in presenting it to her Son Jesus Christ, she may obtain forgiveness and mercy for me"*.

Let us make this prayer of his our own in this moment of sorrow and of lively hope. Let us accompany with affection and gratitude this brother of ours on his last journey towards the true East, that is, towards Christ, the sun that never sets, with full trust that God will welcome him with open arms, keeping for him the place he prepares for his friends, faithful servants of the Gospel and of the Church.

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