



The Holy See

FUNERAL MASS FOR CARDINAL GIUSEPPE CASORIA

HOMILY OF JOHN PAUL II

Saturday, 10 February 2001

1. *"Abyssus abyssum invocat"* (Ps 41 [42]: 8).

The abyss of death is reminiscent of another abyss: the infinitely greater one of God and his love. The Gospel we have just heard speaks of it: "God so loved the world" - this is the abyss that embraces everything, even death - "God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish, but have eternal life" (Jn 3: 16).

The Father wanted to give his Son, consubstantial with him, for human salvation: what a mystery of boundless love! The prophecy we heard in the passage from the prophet Isaiah is fulfilled for us in this abyss of grace and mercy. In all truth, we can exclaim: "Lo, this is our God; we have waited for him, that he might save us. This is the Lord; we have waited for him; let us be glad and rejoice in his salvation" (Is 25: 9).

This is the source and secret of Christian joy which, according to the Lord's promise, no one can take from his friends (cf. Jn 16: 23). Isaiah offers us an eloquent image of this deep and definitive joy in the symbol of the banquet: it foreshadows the announcement of the messianic kingdom which the Son of God came to inaugurate. Then death will be swallowed up for ever and the tears will be wiped away from all faces (cf. Is 25: 6-8).

The time has come for our late Brother, dear Cardinal Giuseppe Casoria, to enter this kingdom definitively. After a long journey on earth, during which he worked energetically as a priest, Bishop and Cardinal, the Lord has now called him to himself to share the destiny promised to his faithful servants.

2. A native of Acerra, Giuseppe Casoria became a priest when he was very young. In addition to his pastoral work, to which he immediately devoted himself with great enthusiasm, he continued to study, earning degrees in theology, philosophy, *utroque iure* and political science. The juridical field was the one in which he became most deeply involved, through various advanced studies and specializations and through the different offices he held in the Tribunals of the

Apostolic Signatura and the Roman Rota, as well as in several dicasteries of the Roman Curia. In particular, he worked for many years in the Congregation for Sacraments, of which he became Undersecretary and later Secretary.

Pope Paul VI appointed him a Bishop at the beginning of 1972 and a year later named him Secretary of the Congregation for the Causes of Saints. For over eight years he zealously carried out this task, until he was entrusted with the direction of the dicastery he knew best, the Congregation for Sacraments and Divine Worship. At the Consistory of 2 February 1983 the Pope created him a Cardinal, assigning him the Title of St Joseph in Via Trionfale.

On 21 December last, the beloved Cardinal celebrated his 70th anniversary of priestly ordination. On that occasion, the emphasis was rightly put on what he had primarily been throughout his long life: a soul in love with Christ, whom he always tried to imitate as a priest, serving him with total dedication in his daily work for the Church. In his spiritual testament he wrote: "I openly confess that I have always believed and want to continue believing, with joy and conviction, firmly and without difficulty, all the truths of the Catholic religion taught to me by the Magisterium of Holy Mother Church, in which, just as I have had the grace to be born, so I also hope to live and die". Sustained by these convictions, Cardinal Casoria went to meet death fully resigned to God's will.

Those who were close to him during his last days heard him say: "Every single day of life, even in illness or suffering, is a special gift from the Lord, for which I thank him". And again: "With deep love I offer all my sufferings for the Church, for the Holy Father and for the whole world".

3. *"If we have died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with him"* (Rom 6: 8).

The passage from the Letter to the Romans from which the second reading of today's celebration is taken is one of the fundamental texts of the liturgical Lectionary. In fact, it is offered to us every year during the Easter Vigil. Let us think of Paul's enlightening words as we pay our last respects to our Brother. How often he must have read them, meditated on them and commented on them. What the Apostle writes about the mystical union of the baptized with the dead and risen Christ, our Brother is now living in the hereafter, freed from the conditions imposed on human nature by sin. "For", as Paul says in this same passage, "he who has died is freed from sin" (Rom 6: 7).

The sacramental, but real, union with Christ's paschal mystery opens for the baptized the prospect of sharing in his own glory. Moreover, this already has consequences for their life in this world because, if through Baptism we already participate in Christ's Resurrection, then we can already "walk in newness of life" (Rom 6: 4). This is why the holy death of a brother in Christ, especially if he is marked with the priestly character, is always a cause of deep and grateful wonder at the plan of the divine Father, who "has delivered us from the dominion of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins" (Col 1: 13-14).

4. Gathered round the altar, let us thank God for the light that his words cast on the course of our lives and on the mystery of death. To him we confidently pray for our friend and brother.

Cardinal Casoria, who was obliged countless times in his ministry to discern and judge, is now called, as each of us will be, to appear before the judgement seat of Christ (cf. 2 Cor 5: 10). For our comfort, however, the Gospel has reminded us that "God sent the Son into the world, not to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him" (Jn 3: 17).

It is consoling to know that we will be judged by the One who has loved us and given himself for us (cf. Gal 2: 20). What a joy to meet the Good Shepherd, whose one sovereign will is that every person may have life and have it abundantly (cf. Jn 10: 10)! So may it be for you, dear brother in Christ, whom today we entrust to the merciful hands of the heavenly Father.

At the side of Christ the Lord, Mary, his Mother and ours, whom we call upon each day to help us "*in hora mortis nostrae*", is certainly present. "I commend myself to the Blessed Virgin", Cardinal Casoria writes in the testament cited above, "so that she will help me rightly to complete my journey on earth and present me lovingly to her only Son, Jesus Christ".

Let us make this prayer our own: at this moment, may Mary be the one who leads him into the heavenly homeland to share in the joy of the eternal banquet which God has prepared for his faithful servants. Amen.