



The Holy See

FUNERAL MASS FOR CARDINAL ALFREDO OTTAVIANI

HOMILY OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II

Vatican Basilica

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Ecce Sacerdos magnus, qui in diebus suis placuit Deo et inventus est iustus (cf. Sir. 44:16-17): these are the first words that rise spontaneously to my lips at the moment in which we offer the Eucharistic Sacrifice to God and prepare to take leave of our revered brother, Cardinal Alfredo Ottaviani. He was really a great priest, distinguished for his religious piety, exemplary fidelity in the service of the Holy Church and of the Apostolic See, solicitous in his ministry and in the practice of Christian charity. And he was at the same time a Roman priest, in possession, that is, of that typical spirit, perhaps not easy to define, that those born here in Rome—as he was born, ten years before the end of the nineteenth century—have by inheritance, as it were; that spirit which is expressed in special attachment to Peter and to the faith of Peter and, again, in keen sensitiveness to what the Church of Peter is and does and must do.

For this reason, I spoke of "exemplary fidelity", and now that he is dead after a long and laborious earthly day, it is easier to perceive this fidelity as the constant characteristic of his whole life. His was really *a tried and unflagging fidelity*. Without wishing to go through the phases of his activity in the different ministries, to which his brilliant intellect and the confidence of the Sovereign Pontiffs called him, he always distinguished himself for this moral quality, an extraordinary quality, a quality that means consistency, dedication, obedience. As Substitute at the Secretariat of State, and then Assessor, Pro-Secretary, Pro-Prefect and Prefect of what was then the Sacred Congregation of the Holy Office, as Prelate Bishop and Cardinal, he gave proof of possessing this quality; a uniform, as it were, which characterized him and identified him in the eyes of those—and there were many of them both in Rome and outside—who knew him and esteemed him. Being responsible for the Congregation which is institutionally entrusted with the safeguarding of the sacred patrimony of faith and of Catholic morality, he expressed this same virtue in a behaviour of

perspicacious attention in the conviction—objectively founded and gradually more and more matured in experience of things and of men—that *rectitudo fidei*, that is orthodoxy, is the indispensable patrimony and the first condition for *rectitudo morum*, or orthopraxis. His high juridical sense, which had made him, when still young, a teacher praised and listened to by many hosts of priests, sustained him in the tenacious work he carried out in defence of the faith.

Always available, always ready to serve the Church, he also saw in reforms the providential sign of the times, so that he was able and wished to collaborate with my predecessors John XXIII and Paul VI, as he had already done with Pius XII and even earlier with Pius XI. His existence was literally spent for the good of the holy Church of God. Our brother in everything and always was *homo Dei, ad omne opus bonum instructus* (2 Tim 3:17); and this is indeed an essential reference, a characteristic element, which highlights his spiritual and moral nature.

He was also a man with a great priestly heart: there are still many people who remember him in his daily ministry in the midst of the boys and youths of St Peter's Oratory, who had him—alongside other unforgotten Roman priests and prelates—as a friend and brother, and I will say better: as a solicitous and affectionate father. This presence of his was not a distraction from the tedious weariness of official papers and bureaucratic commitments, but a necessity that arose spontaneously, intentionally and generously from a priestly programme, a service offered at the bidding of his vocation.

He was born poor in the working-class district of Trastevere, and this origin explains his tender love and preferential solicitude for the poor, for children and for orphans. And now it is just these innocent souls who—beside so many priests and laity who received from Cardinal Ottaviani the light of wisdom, the lesson of simplicity, the medicine of mercy—intercede for him before the altar of the Lord, in order that the reward destined for the "good and faithful servant" (cf. Mt 25:21) may quickly be bestowed on him.

By a strange coincidence this sad rite takes place at the same time at which, exactly a year ago, my beloved predecessor Paul VI was about to leave this world. And I am happy to recall with you the strong and moved voice of the Cardinal when he announced publicly on 21 June 1963 the elevation of Cardinal Giovanni Battista Montini to the Pontificate. From the very tone of his words, though they repeated the usual Latin formula *Habemus Papam*, there could be felt the satisfaction of the old teacher who saw exalted a colleague and friend, so worthy of esteem, who would open an intense and promising season in the Church and for the Church. Both of them, in their respective positions of responsibility, in the obvious distinction of their individual personalities, have now concluded the cycle of earthly existence, to enter definitively—as we all hope and pray—that Kingdom into which their ardent and intrepid faith had brought them in hope.

May the Lord now grant both of them rest in his light, in his peace. Amen!

