



The Holy See

FUNERAL MASS FOR CARDINAL OPILIO ROSSI

HOMILY OF JOHN PAUL II

Friday 13 February 2004

1. "He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day" (Jn 6: 54). While we are preparing to pay our last respects to dear Cardinal Opilio Rossi, we remember this solemn promise of Christ. Feelings of affection and ecclesial communion bound us to this Brother of ours. What linked us to him above all was faith in Christ who died and rose, a faith we now express in the celebration of these holy Mysteries. In the Eucharist, the testament of Christ's love, our Redeemer makes himself our spiritual food and drink for the journey we are making towards the eternal Easter. In the consecrated bread and wine, we are given the pledge of future life that will have no end. Therefore, although they die, those who eat and drink the Body and Blood of Christ will live for ever. The beloved Cardinal of whom we are taking leave today has now reached this state.

2. Faith enlivened the long and fruitful priestly ministry of Cardinal Opilio Rossi. How often did he celebrate the divine Sacrifice, drawing precisely from the Eucharist light and inner strength for his daily decisions and for his apostolate! We are confident that today he is partaking of the heavenly banquet, "face to face" with Christ Our Lord. "*Omnia in Christo*": Cardinal Rossi chose these words from the well-known Pauline phrase: "*Instaurare omnia in Christo*" (Eph 1: 10) as his episcopal motto. With them, he intended to stress that Christians must gather and unite all things and submit them to the lordship of Christ.

3. We can say that despite the limitations of human frailty, this total striving for Christ motivated the Cardinal's unflagging service to the Holy See in the Papal Representations in various countries of America and Europe, and subsequently in the milieu of the Roman Curia. During the dramatic moments of the Second World War, Fr Opilio Rossi, then Auditor at the Apostolic Nunciature in Berlin, had the opportunity to do everything possible, with the late Apostolic Nuncio, Archbishop Orsenigo, for numerous suffering brothers and sisters, imbuing them with courage and nurturing their faith and Christian hope. It was an enriching experience of humanity and solidarity for the weakest. Later during his life, he sought to pass on this experience to the new generations. Indeed, he was convinced that young people have an important lesson to learn from the history of the 20th century: that from hatred, contempt of others, violence and exasperated nationalism flow nothing but tears and blood.

4. Because of the wisdom he displayed in his ecclesial service and the rare human and spiritual qualities that enriched his personality, he was summoned by my venerable Predecessor, Servant of God Paul VI, to be a member of the College of Cardinals; and so he became even more deeply integrated into the life of the Church in Rome. In this new and higher capacity, he continued to offer his appreciated collaboration to the Apostolic See. In particular, he was the first President of the Pontifical Council for the Laity, whose Committee for the Family he also

headed. I myself subsequently called him to preside over the Permanent Committee for International Eucharistic Congresses. Everywhere that Cardinal Opilio Rossi carried out his pastoral and diplomatic work, he left memories of a worthy minister of God who knew how "to make himself close" to all.⁵ "*The souls of the righteous are in the hands of God*" (Wis 3: 1). With this certainty we address our last farewell to him, as we like to think that the heavenly Father is stretching out his merciful "hands" to welcome him. Our hope, as we have just heard in the First Reading, "*is full of immortality*" (Wis 3: 4). May the Virgin Mary accompany you, venerable Brother, on your way to Heaven. You were so devoted to her that you wanted to feature her on your episcopal coat of arms with the symbol of the star. May it be she, the Morning Star, who brings you into the glory of the Resurrection. Amen! © Copyright 2004 - Libreria Editrice Vaticana

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