



The Holy See

FUNERAL MASS FOR CARDINAL ALFONS MARIA STICKLER, S.D.B.

HOMILY OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI

St Peter's Basilica

Friday, 14 December 2007

Your Eminences,

Venerable Brothers in the Episcopate and in the Priesthood,

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Gathered in prayer around his mortal remains, let us pay our final respects to dear Cardinal Alfons Maria Stickler. He shared with us so many years of work in the Lord's vineyard. After a long day on earth, God has now called him to himself to welcome him in his merciful fatherly arms. While we gather with affection round his relatives, round the Salesian Congregation in which he made his first profession on 15 August 1928 and round all who have known and appreciated him, let us turn our gaze with trust to Heaven, from whence comes the one light that can illuminate the mystery of life and death. While the liturgical Season of Advent prepares us to relive the Christmas gift of the Redeemer, it also encourages us to look forward confidently to his final and definitive Coming. For this brother of ours was fulfilled the "blessed hope" which we await, as we say each day in the Eucharistic celebration, seeking during our pilgrimage on earth to live "free from sin and protect[ed] from all anxiety".

The Apostle to the Gentiles has just reminded us that if we die with Christ, "we shall also live with him; if we endure, we shall also reign with him; if we deny him, he also will deny us" (II Tm 2: 11-12). The entire plan of life of the Christian can only be modelled on Christ, all of it with him, for him and in him, to the glory of God the Father. Was it not this fundamental truth that oriented the life of this brother of ours? He chose as his episcopal motto: "*Omnia et in omnibus Christus*", and as he was approaching the end of his life, he explained how these words guided his every choice and decision. "At the root of my activities", he wrote a few years ago, "there has always been the ideal of faith and Christian life that is focused on Christ the Redeemer and then Founder of the Church.

All my efforts and studies have served in particular to deepen religious knowledge with full fidelity to the Pope". And he added: "As a Salesian, I follow the three ideals passed on by Don Bosco: love for the Eucharist, devotion to Our Lady, and fidelity to the Holy Father". He was well aware that loving Christ means loving his Church, which is always holy, as he noted in his spiritual testament, "despite the weakness, at times even scandalous, of us, her representatives and members, in the past and in the present". He knew the opposition and challenges that Christians have to contend with in our age and concluded that only true love for Christ can make them sufficiently courageous and persevering in defending the truth of the Catholic faith.

In this regard, how often must Cardinal Alfons Maria Stickler have read and meditated upon the Gospel passage which has also been proclaimed today at our gathering! The Evangelist Matthew, who will accompany us throughout this liturgical year, adds to the eight Beatitudes that introduce the Sermon on the Mount another which says: "Blessed are you when men revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account", and ends: "Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in Heaven" (Mt 5: 11-12). All of us, dear brothers and sisters, who have been called by Baptism to follow and serve Jesus, know that we cannot and must not expect applause and recognition on this earth. The true reward of the faithful disciple is "in Heaven": it is Christ himself. Let us never forget this truth! Let us never give in to the temptation to seek human success and support, rather than counting only and always on the One who came into the world to save us and who redeemed us on the Cross! Whatever service God may call us to in his vineyard, may it always be enlivened by humble adherence to his will!

That this was dear Cardinal Stickler's approach to the whole of human life, despite human frailty and weakness, is apparent from his spiritual testament, in which he noted: "My whole life was a plan, and an achievement superior to my strength to which I could do no more than consent - often not even fully evaluating the cause. Thus, my entire life was and is a work of Divine Providence". His existence was totally dedicated first to teaching and then to the service of the Holy See. Alfons Maria Stickler was born in Neunkirchen, Lower Austria, on 23 August 1910. As a young man he entered the novitiate of the Salesian Congregation in Germany. After completing his philosophical and theological studies, first in Germany, then in Austria and later, in Turin and Rome, he was ordained a priest on 27 March 1937, 70 years ago, in the Archbasilica of the Lateran.

He took an academic course at the *Institutum Utriusque Iuris* at the Apollinare and started teaching at the Faculty of Canon Law of the Salesian University in Turin, and then in Rome, where he was transferred. At this University, he was Dean of the Canon Law Faculty from 1953 to 1958, then Rector Magnificent (1958-1966) and, until 1968, Head of the newly founded *Institutum Altioris Latinitatis*. In 1971, his nomination by the Servant of God Pope Paul VI as Prefect of the Vatican Apostolic Library came as a great surprise. Here, he had the opportunity to carry out an intense academic activity, testified to in practice by various books and essays on the history of canon law. He was a member of three Commissions of the Second Vatican Council, a consultor to Roman Congregations, a member of the Commission for the new Code and of the Pontifical Committee

for Historical Sciences, as well as of many other international cultural institutions. On 8 September 1983, he was called to be Pro-Librarian of Holy Roman Church, and on the following 1 November, as he observed in his testament, he had received "at an advanced age, the great grace of the fullness of the priesthood [episcopal ordination] through the hands of the Holy Father [John Paul II] himself", who also entrusted him a year later with the office of Pro-Archivist of Holy Roman Church, and on 25 May 1985, elevated him to the dignity of Cardinal. At the end of his active service to the Holy See, this friend of ours continued to carry out his cultural and pastoral activity while at the same time giving even more time to reflection and prayer. Every day, as he did from the first year of his religious profession, he would invoke the Holy Spirit with the hymn *Veni Sancte Spiritus*. He was thus convinced that if he had been able to be of some use to the Congregation and to the Church, "he was indebted for this to the Holy Spirit". Death ushered him into the kingdom of peace and eternal light last Wednesday.

Our brotherly hope is that he may now enjoy the well-deserved reward and contemplate the brilliance of the eternal Truth. In the First Reading, the Prophet Daniel recalled that "those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the firmament; and those who turn many to righteousness, like the stars for ever and ever" (Dn 12: 3). May this be so for our esteemed Confrere in the priesthood and in the episcopate! May he be welcomed by Mary Most Holy, of whom he wrote: "Our Lady, at the moment of my death, will also be the true mother who bestows her love and mercy even upon her less faithful sons". May St John Bosco and the Salesian Saints and Blesseds accompany him. Let us join with affection and gratitude in the invocation with which Cardinal Stickler ended his spiritual testament: "I believe, I hope, I love; forgive my weakness in faith, hope and charity, and lead me, O my God, to the Kingdom of your love. Amen".

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