



The Holy See

MASS OF CHRISTIAN BURIAL FOR CARDINAL PAOLO DEZZA

HOMILY OF THE HOLY FATHER JOHN PAUL II

Monday 20 December 1999

1. *"Pater quos dedisti mihi volo ut ubi ego sum et illi sint mecum"* (Jn 17: 24).

Christ's words, from what is known as his "priestly prayer", give us light and comfort, dear brothers and sisters, at this moment when faith gathers us around the altar of Christ and the mortal remains of the revered Jesuit Cardinal, Paolo Dezza.

Our prayer, grafted onto that of the one High Priest and, as it were hidden in his "*volo*", perfectly reflects the heavenly Father's will for our salvation, source of life in time and in eternity.

Fr Dezza's long life came close to the biblical ideals of longevity, since he lived through almost the entire century which is now ending. He was born in Advent, on the Feast of St Lucy, and he died in Advent, a little closer to Christmas: for him death was the "holy door", the ultimate passage opening onto eternity.

2. With the words of Isaiah, the prophet of Advent, the liturgy just now has resounded with the announcement of the eschatological banquet and God's definitive victory over death. In the presence of Christ, dead and risen, let us, led by grace to Mount Zion, say with faith: "Lo, this is our God; we have waited for him, that he might save us; let us ... rejoice in his salvation" (*Is 25: 9*).

A person's death, and especially that of someone to whom we are tied by deep affection, cannot but cause pain and distress. It was also like this for the Lord Jesus, who at the tomb of his friend Lazarus, was moved to tears when he saw his sisters' sorrow. It is these very tears that God promised to wipe away from all faces (*Is 25: 8*); and he has, and does so for us today, with the hand of the risen One. He fills believers with hope and joy, despite life's trials and afflictions

through which we are granted to purify ourselves, to be found ready for his coming (cf. 1 *Pt* 1: 3-9).

3. To welcome him beyond death and to accompany him to full communion with God, I like to think that Fr Paolo Dezza has found three most beloved and longed-for faces: Mary, Peter and Ignatius, to whom Providence bound his spiritual journey.

In 1928, he was ordained a priest on the feast of the Annunciation of the Lord, almost as if to join his "*Fiat*" to that of the Blessed Virgin, to open himself to the grace of the Holy Spirit. Indeed, in Fr Dezza's intense and numerous tasks and, moreover, in the many virtues of his Christian, religious and priestly soul, the fruitfulness of grace, and the witness of a persevering and generous response to God's plan are unmistakable.

4. However, were we to seek a unifying point that would sum up his whole life and spirituality, the late Cardinal himself provides us with a very clear one. In the homily for the 60th anniversary of his ordination to the priesthood, he said that Fr de Guibert's expression: "*To serve Christ in the person of his Vicar*" was always particularly dear to him, because he seemed to see in it "the decisive factor in my vocation to the Society, and the key to my whole religious and priestly life in the Society".

On that occasion, he recalled the "deep impression" made on him, at the age of almost 13, by his attendance at an audience with Pope St Pius X and he explained how fidelity and devotion to the Pope, which he saw as characteristic of the Jesuits, had been crucial for his vocation. His attachment to the Pope increased during his years of formation to the point that, as soon as he was ordained a priest, he wanted to come to Rome to celebrate Mass in the Clementine Chapel, at the Apostle Peter's tomb.

5. Appointed almost immediately to the Pontifical Gregorian University, where from 1941 to 1951 he was a highly esteemed rector, he had ever closer contacts with the Pontiffs. "These contacts", he said, "enabled me to understand better and better the meaning and value of that *special bond which unites the Society to the Pope*, and showed me the great service which by virtue of that bond the Society can render to the Church, and consequently, the gratitude and special benevolence of the Popes for the Society".

My venerable Predecessor Paul VI, during very difficult years for the Church and for the Society of Jesus, found in Fr Dezza the servant of Christ, the authentic Jesuit, the spiritual man on whose wise advice he could rely in the difficulties of his lofty mission. I myself created him a special Papal Delegate for the Society of Jesus in an important phase of its history.

To serve Christ in the person of his Vicar: St Ignatius' precept was the ideal which inspired the late Cardinal's whole life in his faithful, caring, intelligent and prudent, generous and impartial outlook. He knew of the faults that existed in the Church and in her men, but with caring dedication, full of

love and faith, he helped to alleviate their effects, working for the authentic renewal of the Church.

6. All this, which for him was an object of constant commitment before God, today moves us to heartfelt gratitude. We are enlivened by the trusting hope that the Lord has already welcomed our beloved brother into the fullness of eternal joy, for which, especially in the latter period, he so yearned. Let us pray that his hope has been granted, by offering the sacrifice of the altar and invoking upon him the motherly intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

Consecrated a priest under the sign of the Annunciation, beloved Fr Paolo Dezza breathed his last under the hope-filled gaze of the Virgin of Advent. May she help him to live his "birth in heaven" and celebrate his jubilee there with the angels and saints.

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