



The Holy See

FUNERAL MASS FOR CARDINAL LUCAS MOREIRA NEVES, O.P.

HOMILY OF JOHN PAUL II

Wednesday 11 September 2002

1. *"To the praise of his glorious grace"* (Eph 1,6). The Apostle Paul's words which we have just heard in the Second Reading are an immediate and effective synthesis of the whole life of our venerable brother, Cardinal Lucas Moreira Neves, to whom we are about to offer our last farewell.

He himself chose St Paul's words as the *incipit* of his spiritual testament, written on Holy Thursday 2000, in which he acknowledged the inspiration and interior enlightenment that accompanied him throughout his life. He wrote: *"To the praise of his glory"* - may these words of St Paul - which for nearly 60 years have served as my spiritual enlightenment be also my inspiration at the moment when I appear before God. I deeply desire that in that moment there might be concentrated and brought to completion all my thanksgiving to the Holy Trinity".

2. Entering the Order of the Friars Preachers as a very young man, throughout his life he maintained a deep attachment to his vocation and identity as a spiritual son of St Dominic. In his testament he confided: "I have passionately loved this vocation" and continued, "I hope I will die having been completely faithful to the essential of the Dominican vocation". His religious calling was enriched and magnificently expressed in an intense priestly ministry, first with Catholic students, then as the spiritual director of the Christian Family Movement, later, with intellectuals, journalists and, especially, artists of the theatre and cinema.

As Auxiliary Bishop of *São Paulo* he was appreciated for his outstanding qualities of mind and heart, his pastoral sensitivity, his inexhaustible charity towards the poor, especially toward "his" *meninos de rua* (street children)... On account of these gifts, he was called to take on more important responsibilities.

The Church, the laity, the priesthood, the Petrine service, the young members of the ecclesial associations and movements were some of the Cardinal's favourite topics, expounded on countless occasions. In this regard, how can we forget the Spiritual Exercises he preached in the Vatican in 1982, that were universally appreciated for their deeply spiritual and ecclesial inspiration?

3. With the rich experience of his service in the Roman Curia to the entire Catholic community, Lucas Moreira Neves returned to Brazil as Archbishop of the Primatial See of *São Salvador da Bahia*. After making him a member of the College of Cardinals, I recalled him to Rome in June 1998 to make him Prefect of the Congregation for Bishops, an office he held until September 2000, when for reasons of health, he asked to be relieved.

Precisely in those long years, marked by illness, his constant cooperation for the good of the brothers and sisters became even more apostolic and effective on account of his union with our Lord Jesus Christ. Cardinal Neves himself confesses this with reticence, since he was aware that he was revealing one of the more intimate and delicate acts of his own soul. "To do so costs me a great deal from the natural viewpoint of mere human reason, but in a perspective of faith and obedience to the adorable will of God, I also thank him for my illness". He goes on to give the profound reason for his attitude of faith: "I am comforted by the certainty that, through this suffering, I have entered into communion with the Passion of Christ, I have experienced in life something of Purgatory, and collaborated, more than by any sermon, in the redemption of the brethren".

4. This vision of faith helps us live more intensely the sorrowful moment of the departure of our beloved Brother from this earthly life. Our grief at the loss of his venerable person, a great gift for the Church and civil society, is lessened by hope in the resurrection based on the very word of Jesus that we heard in the Gospel. "For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who sees the Son and believes in him should have eternal life; and I will raise him up on the last day" (Jn 6,40). In the face of the mystery of death, for a person who has no faith, all would seem irreparably lost. Then it is the word of Christ himself that lights up the path of life and gives value to every moment. Jesus Christ is the Lord of Life, and he came "so that nothing should be lost of what the Father has given me" (Jn 6,39).

With this outlook of faith our beloved Brother lived his entire life, totally devoted to God and to the service of his brothers and sisters, especially the poorest, thus becoming a witness of that courageous faith which knows how to trust God blindly.

5. "*I know that my redeemer lives*" (Jb 19,25). In the great silence that envelops the mystery of death, the voice of the ancient believer is raised full of hope: Job implores salvation from the Living One, in whom every human life finds its meaning and its end.

"I shall see God whom I myself shall see, and my eyes shall behold" (Jb 19,26-27), the sacred text affirms, allowing us, at the end of the earthly pilgrimage, to catch a glimpse of the merciful face of the Lord. To this quest for the face of God, Cardinal Neves dedicated his last thought; he chose to end his spiritual testament by expressing a last wish: "On my gravestone I would like nothing but the words of the Psalm: *"Vultum tuum, Domine, quaesivi"* (O Lord, I have sought your face).

And we believe, in the light of faith, that our venerable and beloved Brother is already contemplating that merciful Face of Christ, revealed in the joy of heaven, which he sought in hope throughout his earthly life.

In a special way let us ask this of Blessed Virgin Mary, Queen of Hope, as we entrust to the earth the mortal remains of Cardinal Lucas Moreira Neves. May the Blessed Virgin welcome him into her motherly arms and introduce him to the contemplation of the holy face of her Son, Jesus, in the festive choir of the angels and saints for all eternity. Amen!

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