

Funeral of Father John F. Hotchkin

The readings from the word of God illumine our reflections this morning. They bring the balm of the Lord's healing power to the pain of loss felt by Father Hotchkin's family and friends. The latter include his close collaborators in Washington and also bishops and ecumenical officers in dioceses across the country. For nearly three and a half decades these have looked to Father Hotchkin for guidance as he served us all at the national office of our episcopal conference.

There are also pilgrims of other church families and organizations who have been walking with him in the search for the visible unity of the Christian oikumene, that the "world may believe." And there are those of other religions, partners now in dialogue in the search for greater mutual understanding, who mourn his passing with us.

As a member of the Council for Promoting Christian Unity, I express a profound sense of the loss the Council feels in Rome. Cardinals Walter Kasper and Edward Cassidy, as well as Cardinal Jorge Mejia, asked me personally to convey this sentiment of loss along with their own deep sympathy today.

The prophet Isaiah unfolds a vision of divine power, a power that removes from human mortality its final sting. "He will destroy the veil that veils all peoples...he will destroy death forever. The Lord God will wipe away the tears from all faces...." And in the Preface we shall hear the words, "Lord, for your faithful people, life is changed not ended. When the body of our earthly dwelling lies in death, we gain an everlasting dwelling place in heaven."

In the second reading the apostle Peter preaches, and I quote from the words of Monsignor George Higgins in Washington last Thursday evening: "It is really Peter who preaches to you. . . . Peter who reminds us that God shows no partiality, Peter who proclaims that in every nation whoever fears God and acts uprightly is acceptable to him. Peter who rejoices that the same God who raised his only Son on the third day will raise up all Jesus' brothers and sisters on the last day that everyone who believes in him will receive forgiveness of sins through his name." With Monsignor Higgins I say also, "It is good for us to be here, for we trust in the

mercy of God whom Jack served so well as our priest, our brother and our friend.”

Father Hotchkin first came to share the life of Christ poured forth into his heart with the waters of Baptism. His family circle, the training and example of his parents, helped him see that life grow. His vocation as a Christian found its place and peace in accepting the call of Jesus to service in the priesthood. The Lord’s providence put him in Rome for studies of theology at the time of wonder and surprise that came with the election of Angelo Roncalli as Pope John XXIII. Still vivid in my memory is a visit of this Pope, now a blessed of the Church, to the North American College within a year of his election. He came to help the College, founded a century earlier by Blessed Pius IX, celebrate its centenary. John Hotchkin of Chicago, first Prefect of the College, was chosen to address the Holy Father and present to him a gift, a chalice, on behalf of the seminary community.

The other day, on the Feast of Saints Peter and Paul, I visited Pope John’s new tomb in St. Peter’s and then assisted at the Mass at which Pope John Paul II presided and preached. Here I saw Father Hotchkin’s life work dramatized at the highest public level of the Church’s life. Pope John Paul was recalling his ecumenical mission earlier in the week, with his visit to Ukraine. He then welcomed the presence of the delegation from Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew of Constantinople. The delegation included Bishop Dimitrios, the Ecumenical Officer of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese in this country. The Pope recognized this as another step along the way to full communion. When he embraced Metropolitan Jeremie of France, the congregation exploded with applause. All t