

Funeral Mass

Cardinal William Joseph Levada

ST. MARY OF THE ASSUMPTION CATHEDRAL

SAN FRANCISCO

MOST REVEREND JOHN C. WESTER, HOMILIST

OCTOBER 24, 2019

We are all praying that our readings today and the gathering of so many people is a real consolation to you, dear family members of Cardinal Levada.

Julianne and Stephanie, great nephews and nieces, Manginis, Nunezes and all relatives: our prayers, support and love go out to you today and in the months and years ahead.

And as we hope to be a consolation to you, I assure you that you are a consolation to all of us from Los Angeles, Portland, San Francisco and so many other local Churches gathered here today.

We are also all comforted by the consoling words of Pope Francis, Cardinal Parolin and so many others in Rome who mourn the loss of Cardinal Levada with us.

In addition, our prayers and thoughts today include Jim and Dolores, the Cardinal's sister and brother-in-law as well as his parents, Joseph and Lorraine.

Cardinal Levada was a real presence in the lives of so many:

Archdiocese of Los Angeles as auxiliary bishop and in Portland and San Francisco where the Cardinal served as Archbishop; He served the Universal Church as Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith; So many other ways in which he served:

Bishop co-president of the Anglican/Catholic Dialogue

President of the Pontifical Biblical Commission

President of the International Theological Commission

It is a rather extensive list! It goes on and on...

The Cardinal was present to so many of us as a pastor, relative, mentor and friend. He engaged us, made his presence felt, was practical, real and authentic. You knew if he was in the room!

He added a unique point of view to any discussion, often pointing to something no one had thought of before.

He was a consummate host, making sure you had everything you needed and that a small bottle of Pellegrino was at your side at all times.

He was present in the streets of San Francisco, or Assisi by the Bay as he called it in his beautiful installation homily here, taking his walk in different neighborhoods to get the flavor, the texture and the color of this beautiful City.

He was present as a family member, enjoying reunions, birthdays, baptisms, weddings and funerals. Julianne was mentioning to me just the other day how he would always find the time to spend with family, even if it meant adding several legs to a flight to see a newborn nephew or attend a family event.

He was particularly present to his lifelong friend, Archbishop Niederauer, whom he would introduce as his “older” friend, being born the day before him. I must stop here and note a real deep presence in this friendship. AB Niederauer came to high school late, around November, and was concerned that he was having a hard time making friends. Cardinal Levada, in his usual candid manner, said, “I’ll be your friend.” And so began their enduring friendship destined to last seven decades.

He was even present to his bridge partners, especially this one, who left him once in four spades with only 3 points in my hand (I still say it was his fault!)

We all have our own memories, which converge on this theme of presence: Cardinal Levada got your attention! He was engaging. One day he came up behind me and noted that my “bald spot”, as I called it, had turned into an area.” Wasn’t so much the comment but the twinkle in his eye, the slight, wry smile and the little twitch in his shoulder, as he stood there with his clean pate, waiting for a response.

Yes, Cardinal Levada was PRESENT!

How fitting that this morning we come into the Real Presence of Jesus Christ, here with us in Word and Sacrament, crucified in weakness and risen in glory. We are caught up in the mystery of life giving way to death which in turn gives way to life, made possible through our Savior in whose presence we now are.

Erasmio Leiva-Merikakis, now Father Simeon, speaks of this presence as we confront the Word of God. He tells us that the best method to understand what God is saying to us is not “disincarnate reductivism” (?!) or simple analysis or historical reasoning. Rather, it is to confront God’s Word as in wonderment, admiration, as we would in front of a masterpiece of art or a great poem or a beautiful symphony. He calls it the Logic of Fire or the Logic of the Icon: getting in touch with the intimacy of divine presence in a visceral, dynamic, concrete and physical way. He refers to John the Baptist in the desert pointing to Jesus as the Lamb of God, the descent of the Holy Spirit upon Jesus in the form of a dove in the Jordon River, or when Our Lady is given to us as Mother from the cross, or when water and blood burst from Jesus’s pierced side. In the midst of these “epiphanies” we are called to simple be present to the Presence of God and to experience the mystery and joy of being in the presence of the one we know loves us, as St. Theresa would have it.

This mystery is hinted at in a quote from Graham Greene who once said “I don’t believe in God. I touch God.” He seems to have been echoing St. Thomas, who put his hand into the side of the Risen Christ and said in faith, “My Lord and my God.” Angels can believe without the senses; human beings cannot.

The Church makes visible, touchable, the presence of Christ – and Cardinal Levada knew that to the core of his being.

I remember standing with him many times at this very altar, watching him raise and break the host at the Fraction Rite. I was struck by the way he performed this rite, at once so simple and yet so profound. The General Instruction of the Roman Missal tells the priest not to “unnecessarily prolong or accord “exaggerated importance” to this gesture and the Cardinal did not. But the look on his face and the deliberate manner in which he performed the rite spoke volumes. He was present to the Real Presence; he was touching the face of the risen Christ and he knew it. As the Instruction further states: “The gesture of breaking bread done by Christ at the Last supper, which in apostolic times gave the entire Eucharistic Action its name, signifies that the many faithful are made one body (1 Cor. 10:17) by receiving Communion from the one Bread of Life, which is Christ, who for the salvation of the world died and rose again.” We are captivated by the Divine presence with us now and which St. John relates to us in our Gospel this morning.

The Gospel today captures the essence of this message of presence. Jesus, sent by the Father, makes present the love of God in our midst. As St. Paul says in Romans, “Neither death nor life, no angel or prince, nothing that exists, nothing still to come, not any power or height or depth nor any created thing can ever come between us and the love of God, made visible in Christ Jesus our Lord.” (Romans 8:38-39).

Jesus gives the disciples, and us, his unique commandment: Love one another as I have loved you.” This is a tangible love for St. John. John uses the Greek, aorist tense, signifying a concrete love that is present and touchable in the works that we do, in keeping his commandments. Jesus’s love is not a vague, ephemeral love but one that is rooted in the Father’s love for the Son and made real in the incarnation. Jesus, loved by the Father, is chosen, called, and sent: all tangible realities that touch our lives in a real way. It is this love that carried Jesus to the cross and drew him into new life in the Resurrection, a resurrection that is our guarantee of eternal life.

And this love has consequences, characteristics, that we can discern when we encounter it. It has a ripple effect in our lives and has a tangible quality to it, just like St. John intended when he spoke of a God of love.

As we reflect on these characteristics of Christ’s love, I think we can see clearly how they are woven into the life of Cardinal Levada.

The unity between the Father and the Son is the centerpiece of this Gospel. God, who is love, is the essence of unity. Jesus abides in the heart of the Father and he invites us to join him in that abode. His love for us is our path into the Father’s heart. Remember the beginning of John’s Gospel when Jesus invites the disciples to abide with him. By the end of that same Gospel, the invitation is to abide IN him. In Christ we are one with the Father and one with each other.

Our unity with each other, then, is an outgrowth of the unity we have with Christ and the Father. Jesus commands us to love one another, and if we truly love Christ, then the commandment is fulfilled at once. We cannot have one without the other. Jesus himself told us that love of God and love of neighbor are inextricably woven together. This love is what unites us, our love for Christ and our love for one another in Christ.

We are called to love each other as Christ loves us. This is why Raymond Brown spoke of John’s community as a community of FRIENDS. This Johannine doctrine is not opposed to but distinct from a more institutional, organizational understanding of the Church. For John, the Church is a communion of love, brothers and sisters of Christ who are called by the Master not to be slaves but friends. By being friends of Christ, we are friends of each other.

Paul echoes this theme of unity in Romans. He was the great champion of unity throughout his ministry and writings. In Romans today, he is urging mutual toleration, accepting each other and being sensitive to those who are weak: do not judge your brother or sister, do not look down on them.

For Paul, we are one in Christ. No Christian exists only for himself. But in relation to Christ and through Christ to one another.

Cardinal Levada reflected this unity in his life and ministry.

Before he was priest, bishop or cardinal, he was son, brother, uncle, brother-in-law and cousin. He loved his family and I think he cherished "Uncle Bill" as much as any other title he had.

He carried this love of unity, of family, of ingathering, into his ministry in the Church. Most would not associate the Prefect of the Congregation of the Doctrine of the Faith as "Uncle Bill" but if they did, they would understand the heart of his ministry. As Bishop McElroy said so beautifully, Cardinal Levada had a "natural graciousness and optimism that could bridge barriers of ideology at key moments."

Whether in plenary session of the USCCB, or at the Congregation in Rome or in dealing with a local matter in Portland or San Francisco, he found a way to bring people together, creatively caring for the unity of the Church and the common good. Quite often these matters were contentious and quite complicated but the Cardinal had a gift for bringing us together.

As Bishop Lopes put it, "The Cardinal's work as Prefect of the Congregation was a continuation of his life-long passion for the communion of the Church. Having served long years as a diocesan bishop, he never lost sight of the essential pastoral dimension of his own vocation and the mission of the Congregation in service to the People of God." I would add, a service of unity.

Little wonder, then, that the Cardinal's motto was "Fratres in Unum": "Behold, how good it is and how pleasant, where brethren dwell at one!"

I remember that when Cardinal Levada was Archbishop of San Francisco, he began an annual tradition of a Fourth of July gathering of bishops so they could deepen their affective collegiality. He looked forward to having the priests to his residence for Christmas where we could gather as brothers and enjoy each other's company. He prioritized time with classmates from Los Angeles and from Rome, deepening the bonds that had been forged over the years.

As Pope Benedict XVI said in his encyclical *Deus Caritas Est*, "Love of God and love of neighbor have become one: in the least of the brethren we find Jesus himself, and in Jesus we find God." The Pope could certainly have had Cardinal Levada, his good friend, in mind.

In today's Gospel, Jesus is mentoring his disciples in the ways of love. He chooses them, appoints them, befriends them and gives them the grace they need to carry out his commandment of love.

Again, In *Deus Caritas Est*, Pope Benedict speaks to this truth: "...the 'commandment' of love is only possible because it is more than a requirement. Love can be 'commanded' because it has first been given." God the Father gave us his Son and the Son gave us his love, his life, his very self. We are able to love God because he first loved us. He gave us the grace, the ability: he mentored us in the ways of love by giving us his love.

Jesus tells us in the Gospel this morning that we are to mentor one another, support one another, give life to one another.

This theme is found as well in the first reading this morning from 1 Kings, God's voice not heard in nature but in revelation: God communicating the truth directly to us, mentoring us, teaching us his ways, the ways of love.

Now, it is no secret that Cardinal Levada came to mentoring quite naturally. He was, as most know, nearly incapable of not giving directions to drivers, drawing up the schedule for vacations, arranging flights for meetings or correcting a dangling participle. When Monsignor Schlitt drove the soon to be Cardinal to the airport for his trip to Rome to assume his duties as Prefect of the CDF, Bishop Wang and I were in the back seat to accompany our friend and to mark this historical moment. Harry said to the then-Archbishop, → "Well, Bill, do you want to tell me how to get to the airport?" The Archbishop gave his signature subtle smile and said, "No, Harry, you can go anyway you like." Always the gentleman, he stopped there (but I was waiting to see if he told Monsignor where else he could go!).

Cardinal Levada was a mentor to many and he saw his service to the Church as one of accompaniment, challenge, encouragement and affirmation. He not only loved the faith but desired to pass it on. There are many of us here today who learned a great deal from him, not just in ministry but personally. His influence was incalculable; there are so many who over the years have expressed their gratitude to the Cardinal for all he meant to them and for how he mentored them in their vocation and ministry.

These natural gifts were put to great use in his service to the Church. Whether teaching at the Gregorian University in Rome, Camarillo Seminary in Los Angeles, starting the School of Pastoral Leadership here in San Francisco, serving as a member of the drafting committee for the Catechism of the Catholic Church, writing theological opinions, negotiating complicated issues on the national level of the Bishops' Conference or preaching here in this magnificent cathedral, Cardinal Levada relished and excelled in passing on, clarifying and explaining the faith of the Catholic Church, culminating in his

appointment as Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, a body charged with promulgating and defending doctrine.

I can still remember him sequestered in his downstairs conference room of his residence at 1180 Ellis, writing the glossary for the second edition of the Catechism of the Catholic Church: In all these things he was at his best and doing what he loved in “promulgating and defending” Catholic doctrine.

Bishop McElroy captured this well when he said that Cardinal Levada had “...a continual devotion to the coherent articulation of Catholic faith and the development of a real-world catechetics capable of bringing that faith into the hearts and minds of believers.” He truly had a gift for making the faith intelligible, real and intimate for those he mentored and pastored.

Jesus calls us to lay down our lives for each other. This is true humility: placing our lives at the service of all, losing our lives so we may gain them.

This humility was lived by Christ as he became one of us in the incarnation. In Philippians 2:7 we read that Jesus Christ did not deem equality with God something to be grasped at but took the form of a slave, being born in our likeness.

Jesus calls us friends, not insisting on honors or lording it over others.

This humility is mirrored in 1 Kings. Real power, real strength is found in the gentle breeze, not the mighty wind, earthquake or fire.

St. Frances de Sales summed this up when he said that “nothing is so strong as gentleness, nothing so gentle as real strength.”

Cardinal Levada was a strong man but his real strength was in his gentleness, his kindness and his genuine humility. Now, I am not saying he was timid in his approach to teaching the faith nor was he bashful in his relationships with others. But at the deepest level he was a humble man who accepted people as they were.

It is interesting to note that Joan Frawley Desmond, in her article about the late Cardinal in the National Catholic Register, mentioned that for someone who held such a high position in the Church, the highest of any American prelate, he was relatively unknown. Not surprising! It was never about him. He had his eye always on the Church he loved so much. In another interview he gave to that same paper he said that the Church must always remain true to her fundamental mission, rather than bend to prevailing political currents, or I believe he would add, to building up one’s ego. He was truly a humble man!

He was particularly gentle with people's flaws and mistakes. He did not hold a grudge. He did not write people off simply because they had a different point of view. He was profoundly kind. He had an incredibly non-judgmental attitude toward all. He admitted his own failures and mistakes in a spirit of true humility. He was always ready to give people a second chance if they demonstrated their good will and desire to move forward.

I don't know if Cardinal Levada was a fan of Leonard Cohen but I suspect he would definitely agree with this song, "Anthem." In it he sings, "Ring the bells that still can ring, Forget your perfect offering, There is a crack, a crack in everything, That's how the light gets in... I believe Cardinal Levada exemplified that reality in his own life, always moving closer to the light because he could see where he had failed, where we all fail, where we all must turn to Christ for forgiveness and a new start.

Cardinal Levada was truly a humble man who put the Church, who put others, first. He had a selfless care for others. It was never easy to move from one assignment to another for him, yet he did. It was not easy to take unpopular stands yet he took them, not easy to embrace new challenges but he embraced them, all for the sake of the Gospel, and even when at his own personal expense.

Jesus prayed in the Gospel today that our joy would be complete.

We believe that this was true for Cardinal Levada. His joy was complete. It was an enduring joy that marked a life of fulfilling service. As Pope Francis said in *Evangelii Gaudium*: "Joy adapts and changes, but it always endures, even as a flicker of light born of our personal certainty that, when everything is said and done, we are infinitely loved." (*Evangelii Gaudium: The Joy of the Gospel*).

Cardinal Levada knew the joy of being loved by God and by so many that called him Uncle and friend and pastor. It was fitting that he returned to Rome, the Eternal City, to enter eternal life. He came full circle, you might say, dying peacefully where his life of service had begun so many years before. He was ordained a priest by Archbishop Martin John O'Connor at St. Peter Basilica on December 20, 1961 and his vigil service was presided over by Pope Francis on September 27, 2019 in the same basilica.

His motto stresses "how pleasant it is", how joyful, for brothers to be at one." The Church brought Cardinal Levada great joy as he strove to foster unity through his humble teaching and mentoring, reflecting Christ's love for his Church and his commandment to love one another.

Indeed, it brings all of us great joy today, a quiet, yet genuine joy, to think that Cardinal Levada now gazes upon the Body of Christ as he did from this altar at the fraction rite: intensely present to the Real Presence of Christ for all eternity.

Erasmus Leiva-Merikakis has a reflection on the Word that is appropriate for us today:

Erasmus Leiva-Merikakis, in his meditations on the Gospel of St. Matthew, has a beautiful image of the disciple, the pilgrim, who, nourished by the healing Word of God is compelled to share that healing with others.

In the Greek text, over the omegas of “in my WORD” there are circumflex accents which make the Word the protecting roof over the heads of the disciples.

But, as Erasmus Leiva-Merikakis says, in the Eucharist Christ’s words are food in our mouths and wine in our veins: the PILGRIM IS NOT SATISFIED UNTIL HE HAS DEVoured HIS SHELTER!

The healing Word of Christ is at once shelter and food, security and challenge, intimate and shared, possessed and given away.

As Cardinal Levada did so often from this altar, we now partake of the one bread and the one cup, gazing at the Bread of Life as he did, devouring our shelter and edging ever closer to the Kingdom of God.

I pray that Cardinal Levada’s motto from Psalm 133 will reverberate in our hearts always as we seek to live together in joy and love, conscious, as the psalm says, that it is there that the Lord has pronounced his blessing. That “there”, as the end of the Psalm tells us, is “Life Forever” where we experience the fullness of the Eucharistic Banquet for all eternity.

For now, we can only imagine Cardinal Levada, with all the Levadas, and the Nunezes and the Manginis and Archbishop Niederauer and all in the Communion of Saints enjoying the real presence of Christ for all eternity, where one day we hope to join them.

“Behold, how good it is, and how pleasant, where brethren dwell at one!”