

FULL TEXT

## Cordes' testament: 'God's work in my life'

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ECCLESIA

20\_03\_2024

**Paul Josef  
Cordes\***



*The Daily Compass publishes the full text of the spiritual testament of Cardinal Paul Josef Cordes, president emeritus of the Pontifical Council 'Cor Unum' who returned to the Father's House on the night of 14-15 March. Following his funeral Mass yesterday at the Altar of the Chair in St Peter's Basilica, the body will be transferred to Germany. This Friday, the archbishop of Paderborn, Monsignor Udo Bentz, will preside at 10.00 a.m. the funeral Mass in Paderborn Cathedral. This will be followed by a transfer to the cardinal's hometown, Kirchhundem, where he will be transferred to the parish church. The Daily Compass, with*

*whom His Eminence collaborated several times in recent years for interviews and speeches under his own signature, joins in the mourning of his family and those who lovingly cared for him until the end.*

### **Spiritual testament**

In the evening of my life, I am once again moved by the Church's mission to recognise God's action in the course of events in a world of growing "forgetfulness of God" (Benedict XVI), to hold on to it and to give thanks for it. The psalmist's instruction to "sing of the ways of the Lord, for great is the glory of the Lord" (Psalm 138:5) is unquestionably valid today.

**Even my first years of life reveal His benevolent hand:** my parents and my sister, the local priests, church services and parish life, teachers, lessons and studies, village festivals, football and amateur games - He made use of all these people and circumstances so that my body, my spirit and my trust in His Fatherly goodness would grow. That He had a decisive influence on my biography became indisputable when I was told about the prayer of a nun: the Franciscan Sister Candida from Olpe had been asking God for years to lead me to the sacrament of Holy Orders; she had placed her trust in Him alone, without influencing me or even speaking to me. She simply prayed away my initial inner rejection. Throughout my life, this nun reminded me that it is God who leads our lives. Furthermore, she demonstrates the importance of contemplative vocations for the mission of the Church, and she became my motive to always promote them. In addition to Sr Candida, my spiritual path was shaped by: Johannes Bieker, Director of the Leoninum/Paderborn; Philippe Pamart, a French priest; a short probationary period with the Little Brothers of Charles de Foucauld in Saint Rémy/Mombard and Heinrich Batton, our sub-rector in Paderborn. They all gave me a sense of God's winning closeness and guided me. I was ordained a priest on 21 December 1961.

**The priesthood that Sr Candida prayed for me** then determined the initial phase of my pastoral ministry in an unexpected way. My first appointment was not to a parish, but as second vicar of the St Clement's Study Home in Bad Driburg (diocesan institute for so-called late vocations); this was followed in 1968 by a prefect in the Archbishop's Theological Convent in Paderborn and finally a theological doctorate in the Ordo Sacrament. Surprisingly, further stations followed: Working in the secretariat of the German Bishops' Conference and consecration as a bishop in Paderborn in 1976. When the Polish Bishops' Conference visited Germany for several days in 1978, it fell to me to accompany Cardinal Wojtyla/Krakow in the car. When he was elected Pope soon

afterwards, he brought me to Rome.

**There I ended up in the Vatican's "Council for the Laity".** I came across the new "spiritual movements" and got to know their initiators personally; their struggle for their own salvation and their zeal for the Gospel had touched them and was evident in them. They became witnesses to me of the salvation that comes from God. Engaging with them occasionally left me breathless. But their companionship was a grace; their development and work gives hope to many in the church. They rely on God's Word, as interpreted by the Church, in a believing and yet true-to-life way; on a reverent and captivating liturgy; on authentic Christianity and the sustaining community of life that is so sought after today. Their emergence demonstrates that God is still active in the living Christ; that He still awakens holiness today.

**Gifted and challenged in this way,** I endeavoured to become a messenger of faith to my fellow human beings as well. The truth of the Gospel and the community of the Church gave me reliable guidance with their double obligation to love God and my neighbour. And I was increasingly amazed, even moved, that the Almighty in his Son really wants to be loved by us - because we already experience human love as the most delightful and moving thing of all.

**In 1995, John Paul II appointed me President of Cor Unum,** the Vatican dicastery for the coordination of the Church's aid organisations. Inevitably, I became aware of how the first part of the divine commandment, the love of God, had lost its importance - both in organised acts of love and in being a Christian in general. It is true that peace, justice and the integrity of creation must be promoted as a matter of urgency today; it is true that it gives the church greater credibility to commit itself to these fields of endeavour. However, I was certain that such goals could never obscure or perhaps replace the typical and specific nature of the church's mission; that they now have numerous social advocates anyway. God's Word itself warns Christians against handing themselves over to the earthly, this-worldly. The apostle Paul sharply criticises the Corinthians for being content with secular tangibles. The message of Christ's resurrection and eternal life would no longer define them: "If we have set our hope on Christ in this life only, we are more miserable than all other men" (1 Cor 15:19). The Easter hallelujah can therefore not be drowned out or even compensated for by anything in the church's proclamation.

**A look back with faith at my story convinces me** that it was not determined by chance or my own access. In my case, the personal part was merely a lack of faith and culpable selfishness. On the other hand, I was able to experience it: God is, and He is for me, He is there for us (according to Julius Cardinal Döpfner on 21 November 1973). I

would like to leave this certainty to my fellow travellers in my farewell hour. It remains for me to ask them for forgiveness for the offences they have suffered and for their prayers that I may attain eternal bliss in God's triune life.

Rome, Feast of St Matthew the Apostle 2021