



CURIA GENERALIZIA DELLA COMPAGNIA DI GESÙ

Death of Father Adolfo Nicolás, S.J.

2020/06

TO THE WHOLE SOCIETY

Dear Brothers,

With sorrow, but at the same time full of gratitude, I wish to inform you that today, May 20th, in Tokyo, the Lord called to Himself Father Adolfo Nicolás, our former Superior General.

Father Nicolás, affectionately called “Adolfo” by many of us and “Nico” by the Jesuits of Asia Pacific, was born in Palencia (Spain) on 29 April 1936. He entered the Society on 14 September 1953 and was ordained a priest on 17 March 1967. As a scholastic he was sent to the mission of Japan, where, among other things, he was professor of theology, rector of scholastics and provincial, later dedicating himself to social work with immigrants in Tokyo. For ten years he lived in the Philippines, serving as director of the East Asia Pastoral Institute (EAPI) and as president of the Conference of Provincials of East Asia and Oceania. After presenting his resignation as General of the Society, he was a spiritual director at EAPI and in the Arrupe International Residence in Manila.

Father Nicolás was elected Superior General by the 35th General Congregation on 19 January 2008. Eight years later, on 3 October 2016, General Congregation 36 accepted his resignation. On that occasion, representing the members of the Congregation and in the name of the Society, Father Federico Lombardi addressed Father Nicolás with heartfelt words of gratitude for his generous service as Superior General. I invite you to reread that tribute, included among the documents of GC 36. It captures in exemplary fashion the personal style with which Father Nicolás exercised authority -- always full of warmth, goodness, and joy -- as well as his innumerable contributions, as Superior General, to the progress of the Society and of the Church. As Father Lombardi said, we will never forget two words that Father Nicolás repeated constantly and that inspired us in the renewal of the Society: “universality” (of our vocation and our mission) and “depth” (spiritual and intellectual, for the sake of our mission).

The best way to remember Father Adolfo Nicolás may be with a brief prayer, written in his own hand in Italian after an eight-day retreat with his General Council in 2011, Exercises that I had the privilege to accompany. Many months after those Exercises, some meetings of the Council began with this prayer, which arose from the personal meditation of Father Nicolás on the miraculous catch of fish narrated by Saint John in chapter 21. It is an excellent synthesis of his person and of his spirituality. The original version of the prayer is this:



Lord Jesus,

What weaknesses did you see in us that made you decide to call us, in spite of everything, to collaborate in your mission?

We give you thanks for having called us, and we beg you not to forget your promise to be with us to the end of time.

Frequently we are invaded by the feeling of having worked all night in vain, forgetting, perhaps, that you are with us.

We ask that you make yourself present in our lives and in our work, today, tomorrow, and in the future yet to come.

Fill with your love these lives of ours, which we put at your service.

Take from our hearts the egoism of thinking about what is “ours,” what is “mine”, always excluding, lacking compassion and joy.

Enlighten our minds and our hearts, and do not forget to make us smile when things do not go as we wished.

At the end of the day, of each one of our days, make us feel more united with you and better able to perceive and discover around us greater joy and greater hope.

We ask all this from our reality. We are weak and sinful men, but we are your friends.

Amen.

Reading this prayer reveals the true Adolfo: a wise, humble, and free man; totally and generously given to service; moved by those who suffer in the world, but at the same time overflowing with hope drawn from his faith in the Risen Lord; an excellent friend, who loved to laugh and to make others laugh; a man of the Gospel. It is a blessing to have known him. As we pray for his eternal happiness with the Lord, whom he served so well, we ask to be able ourselves to continue serving the mission as he did, with goodness, generosity, and joy.

Fraternally,

Arturo Sosa, S.J.
Superior General

Rome, 20 May 2020
(Original: Spanish)