

FUNERAL OF THE GRAND MASTER OF THE ORDER OF MALTA

Frà Andrew Bertie : the last, emotional salute

‘We can without doubt say that Frà Andrew Bertie was ‘one of the just’ in the biblical sense of the word. Because the just are those who are open to the Will of God, and our Grand Master, as one of these, wished to delineate a new order in history, to which he was passionately committed. This was our Grand Master.’ Thus the Cardinalis Patronus of the Order of Malta Pio Laghi recalled Frà Andrew Bertie, Prince and Grand Master of the Order of Malta, during the solemn funeral celebrated today in Rome at the fifth century Basilica of Santa Sabina, on the Aventine Hill.

In his homily, Cardinal Laghi emphasised how the Grand Master had particularly promoted spirituality among the members of the Order, by his own example, and by always reminding them of the importance of the Order’s charism: *Tuitio fidei, obsequium pauperum*. He was steadfast in his visits to the sick in hospital and in assisting the disabled during pilgrimages to Lourdes and to Loreto.

To inspire all who work in the care of the sick and the needy and to modernise the structures and the organisation of the Order, he promoted meetings and conferences at the national and international level, the most recent being held in Malta, Lebanon, Cameroon, Bolivia, Mexico and the United States.

Mourners from around the world - the family members, friends, members of the Order, Cardinals, Ambassadors, volunteers and staff, all of whom held this servant of God in deep affection – attended the Funeral Mass for the Grand Master of the Order of Malta, Fra’ Andrew Bertie, who died on 7 February at the age of 78.

At 11 o’clock the cortege departed from the Priory church and along the famous avenue of laurels of the Magistral Villa under a brilliant sun. Made up of members of Frà Andrew’s family and senior members of the Order, two mounted Carabinieri of the Italian Republic stood to attention as the procession passed through the arched gateway. The monks of the nearby Benedictine abbey church of Sant’Anselmo walked alongside, intoning Gregorian chant. A military guard of honour made up of Carabinieri and the Order’s Military Corps of the Italian Association awaited the arrival of the coffin at the Basilica. The Last Post sounded.

The solemn High Mass was celebrated by the Cardinalis Patronus of the Order, Cardinal Pio Laghi, and concelebrated with Cardinals Cordero Lanza di Montezemolo, Poupard, Tauran, Martino, Rodé, Foley, the Prelate of the Order, Monsignor Angelo Acerbi, and numerous chaplains, all robed in purple. Also present were Cardinals Sodano, Daoud, Lajolo and Sozka.

The acting head of the Order, the Lieutenant *ad interim*, Frà Giacomo Dalla Torre del Tempio di Sanguinetto, concluded the moving service by reading the Prayer of the Order in Latin. Then in solemn procession, the family and senior members of the Order accompanied Fra’ Andrew Bertie to his last resting place in the Order’s church of Santa Maria del Priorato, where he joins two other Grand Masters - Frà Galeazzo de Thun Hoenstein (75th Grand Master, 1905-1931) and Frà Angelo de Mojana de Cologna (77th Grand Master, 1962-1988). The interment which followed in the splendid eighteenth century Piranesi church was a simple ceremony - Latin prayers intoned over the coffin draped with the Order flag, a white eight-pointed cross on a red ground.

Around the world, at the same hour, Masses were celebrated in Order churches and chapels and hospitals to mark the passing of this much loved leader.

The State Funeral, when heads of state and dignatories from around the world will be present, together with thousands of Order members, workers and volunteers, takes place on the afternoon of Saturday 8 March in the Basilica of St. Paul’s Outside the Walls.