

Hundreds Wave Last Goodbye to Cuban Priest and Scholar

Hundreds of people gave their last goodbye on Saturday to Cuban priest and scholar Carlos Manuel de Cespedes, an outstanding and influential figure of the Catholic Church in Cuba, who passed away at 77 in Havana.

Cespedes was buried in the Prelates' Pantheon at Havana's Christopher Columbus Cemetery, after a mass was officiated for him at the local San Agustin church.

Over 600 persons gathered at the church, where Cespedes was a priest, to attend the mass, which was officiated by the Archbishop of Havana, Cardinal Jaime Ortega. The mass was attended by bishops and priests from different Cuban provinces.

Also present at the ceremony, was the president of the Cuban Parliament Esteban Lazo, and the head of the Communist Party Office for the Attention to Religious Affairs, Caridad Diego, as well as scholar Ricardo Alarcon.

During the mass, Cardinal Ortega said that Cespedes was, to a large extent, the savior of the Cuban seminary as an institution in a given time and he stressed the priest's love for Cuba, which he instilled in young generations.

The outstanding religious leader was born in Havana on July 16, 1936. He was a descendant from the Father of the Cuban Homeland Carlos Manuel de Cespedes, who started the Cuban independence war against Spanish Colonial rule in the 19th century.

Cuba and the church are my two passions, said Cespedes two years ago during an interview with Cuban television.

Wreaths were laid over his tomb in the names of President Raul Castro, the president of the Cuban Artists and Writers' Association, Miguel Barnet and friends such as Alicia Alonso.

Cespedez, who dedicated his life to the Catholic Church and his country, was rector of the Havana-based San Carlos and San Ambrosio Seminary and director of the General Secretariat of the Conference of Cuban Catholic Bishops. He was also chancellor of the Archbishopric, and member of several departments of the Latin American Episcopal Council and cultural consultant to the Holy See.

The Monsignor was a writer, professor, scholar and member of the Cuban Spanish Language Academy. He was awarded numerous distinctions, such as the papal order of Chaplain of His Holiness

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