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Pope says Cardinal Martini's love for Bible guided his life

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MILAN, Italy -- The late Cardinal Carlo Maria Martini was a "generous and faithful pastor of the church," who not only studied the Bible, "but loved it intensely and made it the light of his life," Pope Benedict XVI said.

In a message read at Cardinal Martini's funeral Monday in Milan, where the cardinal had served as archbishop from 1979-2002, the pope said the Jesuit cardinal's love of Scripture enabled him "to teach believers and those searching for truth that God's word is the only word worthy of being listened to, accepted and followed."

Martini, a renowned biblical scholar, died Friday at the Jesuit retirement center near Milan after a long battle with Parkinson's disease. His body was transferred to the city's cathedral Saturday where, according to the Archdiocese of Milan, 200,000 people filed past his body to pay their respects.

Pope Benedict's message to mourners, read at the funeral by Cardinal Angelo Comastri, praised Martini's "great openness" and willingness to engage in dialogue with everyone, to explain the reasons for his faith and hope.

Martini's funeral followed the Ambrosian rite, a liturgical tradition particular to Milan. Cardinal Angelo Scola of Milan presided and Jesuit Fr. Adolfo Nicolas, superior general of the Jesuits, was among the concelebrants.

The archdiocese said 6,000 people filled the cathedral for the Mass, while another 15,000 watched on big screens placed in the square outside the church.

The mourners inside the cathedral included dozens of cardinals and bishops, hundreds of priests, and representatives of Orthodox and other Christian churches, as well as the Jewish and Muslim communities. Martini's sister and two nephews were in the front pew, along with Italian Prime Minister Mario Monti and other government officials.

In his homily, Scola said Martini's life and ministry were marked by his expertise in biblical studies, "attention to the contemporary reality, willingness to welcome everyone, sensitivity to ecumenical and interreligious dialogue, care for the poor and the neediest and the search for paths of reconciliation for the good of the church and civil society."

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