

Archbishop Timothy P. Broglio, J.C.D.
AMS Annual Benefit Mass
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The civil war in Spain was particularly brutal for the Catholic Church and no small number of Catholics has been canonized. Many anecdotes have been handed down to us to recall their bravery. The story is told of Father Marcos, a noted preacher, sentenced to death.

Standing before the firing squad he asked the officer in charge for a favor—that he be allowed to preach a final, brief sermon. Having been given permission, he made the sign of the cross and declared that he had always prayed for three things:

By the grace of God to be saved;

“That I would be allowed to give my life for Christ.” It would seem that these two requests have been granted. “However, I am in doubt about the third. I prayed that at least one soul would reach heaven as a result of my preaching.”

Suddenly, one of the riflemen threw away his arm, ran up, and knelt at the feet of the priest and begged for absolution. The others shouted at him: “Get away! Get away or you will be shot with him!”

Making the sign of the cross, he said the words of absolution; the marksmen fired their rifles and Father Marcos and the soldier fell together.¹

The priest knew what was important, prayed, and remained faithful until death. The soldier was open to the word and chose eternal life over the immoral orders of the officer in charge. These last days of the liturgical year dramatically ask us to consider what is important, how we respond, and what we do to help others hear the message of salvation.

The prophet Malachi wrote about the end of time. We have all seen the signs of warning, the naming of days, and the threats. We may perhaps take comfort in the passing of those predicted days and think that the end of the world will not come in my lifetime. However, the

¹ Cf. Richard Beyer, *The Catholic Heart, Day by Day*, p. 322.

personal end times will touch all of us. We are not eternal. At some point the Lord will call our name.

The inevitability of death is not a reason for fear—unless we are overcome by serious sin. It is a passage into the fullness of that life into which we were baptized. How eager we are for all to know that truth.

It is also not a reason to sit on our hands and wait. St. Paul told the Thessalonians in his first letter to them that the Lord would return and believers should focus on that definitive meeting. Some began to think that there was no need to work. We should just wait and perhaps interfere in what everyone else was doing.

The sacred Author reacts clearly and decisively against that concept in this second letter. He reminds them and us that we do not know the day nor the hour. We must live in a state of preparedness and give example of our use of the talents we have been given. We should also mind our own business.

We are His 24/7 and our offering is constant and consistent: the best that we have as we recognize in this perfect prayer, the celebration of the Eucharist. One of the reasons we gather tonight is to pray for and sacrifice so that our men and women in uniform and their families have access to the sacraments—so that they can pray this perfect prayer and build their communities with the strength of sacraments. Tomorrow I will join five priests at the Lord's table just before they complete their final preparations to be chaplains in the US Navy. We long to multiply those numbers.

We are sensitive, as well, and offer not only the good things received, but also the pain, illness, and sufferings. These complete in us what is lacking and fortify us for the final test.

Your abundant, generous response to the invitation to build up both the Archdiocese for the Military Services, USA, and the St. John XXIII Foundation offers those engaged in meeting the pastoral needs of Catholics in the military, the VA, and outside our boundaries hope, sustenance, and the pastoral care guaranteed by our Constitution. Thank you.

Finally, when we hear this Gospel passage, we are probably a bit shaken. It is very counter-cultural to consider the last things, because we are not often challenged to think not only about our mortality, but also that of the world in which we live. We expect everything to keep improving. We think that it can only get better!

It is sober to ask if we are happier than earlier generations. Why, then, is suicide so prominent?² Are we closer to God? Does anyone know and keep the Ten Commandments? Are we wiser? Have you identified the new Socrates, the new Plato, the new Aristotle, the new Augustine or Thomas Aquinas?

Is our emotional and mental health better? Then why are the psychologists and psychiatrists so busy? Is the family better off now than it was? Has anyone looked at the divorce rate, wondered why families do not eat together, or why the youngest generations cannot communicate without a device and a screen?³

² The rates of depression among American adolescents has doubled over the course of the 2010's.

³ Cf. Peter Kreeft, *Food for the Soul*, C, p.643.

You know that the temple was destroyed by the Romans in 70 AD about forty years after Jesus preached this sermon. His words were not and never are empty.

Indeed, Jesus cautions His disciples of all time: make fundamental claims: “I am He” and the “time is near”. Be aware of those who try to take the place of God—our identity comes from Him alone: reborn in Christ Jesus in the waters of baptism: reflect often on that gift, value, and newness. His plan will lead us to eternal happiness: no agency, treatment, wonder medicine, car, job, or anything else is a substitute.

Think also about the wars that plague our society and those served by this Archdiocese. More people died in the wars of the last century than in any previous century. I am not even counting the unborn who never saw the light of day.

We continue to see the effects of natural disasters—perhaps even made worse by our inattention to the cry of nature. Our poor brothers and sisters in the Caribbean are still trying to remake these lives after Melissa.

Even the warning about being persecuted and handed over is a reality in so many parts of the world. There is more persecution of Christians today than there has ever been since the time of the early Church. Nigeria, the Middle East, India, China, and Nicaragua come readily to mind, but we cannot forget the subtle persecution in Europe or even in our own country where we must stand up to be counted, resist the gruel of mediocrity so readily served, and speak about justice, human dignity, and our own right to pass on what we have received. I was surprised to hear about a garrison commander who objected to a priest making my recent pastoral letter available to his flock. Certainly, the military knows about protected speech in a religious environment. Dear Sisters and Brothers, we cannot sleep. The Lord bids us to stay awake!

Ah, but it is not all negative. By your perseverance you will secure your lives”, says the Lord. Your lives for eternal life constitute His message. The invitation is to look for eternal life, to seek the Kingdom of God.

We are about to conclude a Jubilee Year of hope and we are in a place of pilgrimage made holy by the relics of St. John Paul II, who spent himself in teaching us to preach the truth fearlessly and open wide the doors to Christ. He reiterated that message throughout the world. Let us draw confidence from the presence and guidance of the Lord. We see in others evidence of and a catalyst for our faith.

The setting for this evening’s Gospel reveals the constant danger of basing faith on the temple and its beauty, faith is not in a physical structure, but in a person, Jesus Christ and His Gospel. He clearly sends us forth to evangelize. The lesson of mission over maintenance is to be learned in every age. So much tension weighs when the vision is glued to buildings and not to the Gospel.

To quote Pope Leo at a recent canonization: “... during this Jubilee Year, we celebrate the hope of these courageous witnesses of the faith. It is a hope filled with immortality because their martyrdom continues to spread the Gospel in a world marked by hatred, violence and war; it is a hope filled with immortality because, even though they have been killed in body, no one

can silence their voice or erase the love they have shown; it is a hope filled with immortality because their witness lives on as a prophecy of the victory of good over evil.”⁴

Even in death Father Marcos was eloquent and drew another to taste eternal life. Our charge is always and everywhere to tell the truth about Jesus Christ and inspire hope in Him, the Savior of the world.

⁴ Pope Leo XIV, Homily for Canonizations, 14.IX.25.