

Archbishop Timothy P. Broglio, J.C.D.
St. Martin of Tours
Annual Benefit, 11.XI.16



One of the most striking frescoes in the world is the Last Judgment with which Michelangelo, already an older man, decorated the apse of the Sistine Chapel. The subject was already a favored one by artists of the Middle Ages and the early Renaissance and the Florentine painter was influenced by them. Our setting this evening is more elegant and dramatic than most neutral military chapels, but I think that Father Rupnik would be the first to say that he is not Michelangelo.

Indeed, Michelangelo makes more than a few theological statements in his masterpiece: such as the importance of prayer, the end of intercession (the Blessed Mother merely looks at her Son, she no longer intercedes), and so forth. In this chapel we also perceive the work of an artist who wants to help us to pray. What indeed is the motive for our prayer this evening?

Obviously, we gather to pray for those who have served this Nation in the Armed Forces and to beg mercy for them as this special Holy Year of Mercy draws to a close. Secondly, we want to pray for an increase of chaplains to serve in the military. Finally, we want to invoke the intercession of St. Martin of Tours so that we can see the Lord every time He manifests Himself to us.

Isaiah sets the tone by presenting himself as one with joyful news from the Lord. The gift of the Spirit urges him forward with a mission. As the Chosen People return from the exile in Babylon, they are depressed and must place their hope only in the Lord. That puts them squarely in the Old Testament category of the poor who look for God's action in their lives. The prophet makes visible the care of Almighty God for them.

The role is very similar to that of the Catholic priest in the military and the VA. In the midst of the battle, despite the throes of illness and injury, in the face of a family on the verge of destruction, and at the edge of despair, he brings hope. "He has sent me to bring

glad tidings to the lowly, to heal the brokenhearted,....To give them oil of gladness in place of mourning, a glorious mantle instead of a listless spirit.”¹

Our prayer this evening is in thanksgiving for all of those who have served our Nation. We think of the fallen in all wars, but also those who returned laden with the burdens, emotions, challenges, and wounds of war. We pray for their families. We cannot allow this extraordinary Holy Year of Mercy pass by without a special invocation for all of those who suffer and will suffer from the effects of the inability of all men and women to see each others as brothers and sisters.

Our prayer is also an earnest one for peace. To quote Pope Benedict XVI: “Contemplating the sublime reality of human nature, we can experience the same amazement felt by the Psalmist. Our nature appears as openness to the Mystery, a capacity to ask deep questions about ourselves and the origin of the universe, and a profound echo of the supreme Love of God, the beginning and end of all things, of every person and people.”²

Is that not also the message of St. Martin, born in Hungary in 316, the Roman soldier who becomes a hermit and then establishes the first monastery in the West? Later he is Bishop of Tours, truly a citizen of the world in a time before an errant nationalism led us to look first at the pedigree before embracing the fellow son or daughter of Adam! We honor our men and women in uniform and I struggle to assure their pastoral care. We need them, but is it not also our earnest prayer that someday there will be no need of Armed Forces?

In the meantime, Pope Francis reminds us that “The role of military chaplains is to accompany and support [those engaged in and affected by armed strife] on their journey, to be a comforting and brotherly presence for them all. [They] can pour upon these peoples’ wounds the balm of the Word of God which alleviates suffering and instills hope; and [they] can offer them the grace of the Eucharist and of Reconciliation, so as to nourish and regenerate the afflicted soul.”³

I am grateful to all of you who do so much to help me increase the number of chaplains in the Armed Forces and the VA. The number of co-sponsored seminarians continues to increase, the participation in the discernment retreats does not wane, and I continue to urge my brother bishops to help me care for their faithful, who –for a time—are part of the military.

Continue to pray for more vocations and a generous response to the appeals for priests to serve as chaplains. The Lord calls, but we must facilitate a generous response to His invitation. We cannot leave the men and women who serve and their families without the sacraments and the guidance that only a priest can give.

¹ Is. 61: 1-3 (partial).

² Pope Benedict XVI, Message for World Day of Peace, 2011.

³ Pope Francis, Address to participants in formation course on humanitarian law, 26.X.15.

It is written of St. Martin that “the joyful news reached him as he fulfilled his military service. From then onwards his whole life was converted into a militia for the Gospel. He was indefatigable when it was time to bring joy to the afflicted; to guide those at war to pardon and peace; to point out with his example the goal to which all tend: heaven, the Reign of God.”⁴

Finally, we have just heard the account of the Last Judgment, solemnly introduced by the Lord Jesus just before His Passion and Death. He knows who He is and recognizes His authority and responsibility. His power is one of service. Unlike the kings of this world, His rule is gift. Each person is free to open his or her heart to Him. There is no constraint; to follow Him is to choose. Each person must let himself be guided and led to that fullness, which is Christ.

His role as Shepherd also obliges Him to judge on the basis of charity. We cannot fail to recognize His role as the Judge of the universe. In order to be ready to meet Him on the last day, we must be embodied with His love right now. What is vital is fidelity to Him—the opinion of others, the evaluation of those who control the media, form public opinion, and so forth have value only in as much as they help others to recognize Him.

He is the center and we must identify Him in those we assist. That requires attention, faith, perseverance. It is easy to love each person if we always see Him. The judgment scene brings home the danger of omission. We can kill by not giving another what he needs in order to live; by failing to recognize his unique human dignity. As St. John Chrysostom wrote: “To fail to share our goods with the poor is to rob them.”

From childhood I remember the story of St. Martin and the beggar. Martin dramatically cuts his cloak in half to offer some warmth to the poor man. Later he dreams that he sees Jesus Christ wearing that half a cloak. To meet Christ, we learn to see Him in those in need. There is no need to rush off to latest miraculous appearance, because the Lord is close by. He is anyone who needs us: the beggar, the family helped by Catholic Charities, the neighbor who needs a kind word or gesture, the lonely Veteran greeted in a medical center, or the fellow driver we allow into the unending flow of traffic.

After all we are on a pilgrimage and so our present lifestyle should indicate that eternal life is always on the horizon. We live following the good Shepherd and so we still have time. The Lord invites us and gives us strength to respond. The contemplation of the Final Judgment dominates the liturgies as the Church year draws to a close. Keeping vigil in the context of our Christian duty helps us to maintain charity at the center.

The principal enemy to be overcome is the human ego, our selfishness. “If we put love for our neighbor into practice in accordance with the Gospel message, we make room for God’s dominion and his Kingdom is actualized among us. If, instead, each one thinks only of his or her own interests, the world can only go to ruin.”⁵

⁴ Cabra and Zevini, *Lectio Divina*, 17, p. 442.

⁵ Pope Benedict XVI, *Angelus*, 23.XI.08

The assertion of human freedom in this context is so important, especially in our world where many forces strive to dominate us. The powerful social communications world wants to dictate a relativism that compromises truth. Other forces want to keep religion in the sacristy. Others become nervous if it is suggested that the Gospel should influence how we decide.

“From the beginning of Christian history, the assertion of Christ's lordship over the world and over history has implicitly recognized that man should not submit his personal freedom in an absolute manner to any earthly power, but only to God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: Caesar is not 'the Lord'. 'The Church. . . believes that the key, the center and the purpose of the whole of man's history is to be found in its Lord and Master.'”⁶

The Last Judgment does not look down on us here, but the Lord, King of the Universe does and He calls us to dwell with Him forever. Our affirmative response includes our willingness to guide others to Him!

⁶ CCC 450.