

**Archbishop Timothy P. Broglio, J.C.D.**

Homily for the Funeral Mass of the Most Reverend Francis X. Roque,  
Retired Auxiliary Bishop for the Archdiocese for the Military Services, USA  
19 September 2019



First of all, I express my heart-felt sympathy to the family of the late Bishop Roque. You cared so well for him and were so important to him. Now that the final struggle is over, there is a certain emptiness. Remember that he continues to live in the lessons he taught you and the treasured memories that are yours.

At the same time, we gather in this magnificent cathedral of Saints Peter and Paul, because we have been convoked by our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ to participate in His unique sacrifice which knows no separation of time or place. We are present with Him and with all who believe in Him, because we want to pray for Bishop Roque's eternal reward.

After the baby Francis was born into new life in the waters of baptism, the priest handed a candle to his godfather with the reminder—perhaps in Latin: "Receive this burning light, and keep the grace of your baptism throughout a blameless life. Observe the commandments of God."

Very simply that is the mandate that is ours: keep the commandments, live a blameless life, and be a light that illuminates the path to everlasting life for ourselves and for others. It seems simple, straightforward, and a clear path to life without end. In fact, the great St. Augustine used to get on his knees before the faithful to attest to the presence of the Holy Spirit and the greatness produced by the radical rebirth that occurs at baptism, the new condition of being sons and daughters of a loving Father who calls us to Himself.

Yet it is a challenge to keep that light burning brightly for ourselves and for others. Contemporary society often makes it difficult to be clear witnesses to the truth. Friendship

with Jesus Christ must be developed. The good shepherd, St. Augustine reminds us, “did not seek what was his, but what was Christ’s.”<sup>1</sup>

Sixty-six years ago today, a young Frank Roque understood that when, after his name was called, he stood up in this Cathedral and said “adsum”. He responded to the Lord’s call to serve His people and help them keep the light shining brightly.

Of course, he did not know exactly what the Lord and His Church had in store for him. He could not foresee Army chaplaincy, Episcopal Office, or serving as the longest incardinated cleric in the Archdiocese for the Military Services, USA, in her short 34 year history. However, he was present when the Lord called and responded continually and generously over the last sixty-six years.

We just heard the dimensions of that response in the Gospel passage where Jesus explains the essential meaning of ministry. “Unless the grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains just a grain of wheat; but if it dies, it produces much fruit.”

Christ, the grain of wheat that falls to the earth and dies teaches us to die to ourselves and helps us to understand the very mystery of death. As hard as modern society tries to hide death, it is the only threshold that opens up into eternal life. It is a necessary passage. Jesus is trying to teach His disciples about the up-coming Passion and the separation of death.

On Calvary He will be stripped, they will take off His clothes, but this passage is the real disrobing. It is He Himself who takes off the armor. He appears weak, fragile, defenseless, and lost.<sup>2</sup> The grain of wheat that dies is the mystery of Christ.

This passage from St. John really substitutes for the agony in the garden. The final temptation: should I ask the Father to save me from this hour? Cross already seems too heavy to bear even in thought. The filial obedience of Jesus glorifies the Name of the Father, because it reveals Trinitarian love. The sacrifice bears fruit: it realizes the salvation of the world.

Christ is the seed fallen into our dry earth. “No life is possible without fruit, and no fruit is possible without the death of the seed.” His death to self leads to the glorification and the manifestation of His love for us. That is not a message particularly attractive to our society. We want our gratification now. We are not patient and we find looking ahead to eternal life very difficult.

Here we treat the very mystery of the mission of Jesus Christ and thus our salvation. “The vitality of the buried seed is prodigious,” wrote an Italian Abbess. “The law of the seed is to die so as to multiply: there is no other meaning and no other function other than to offer service to [everlasting] life. The same is true for the self-emptying of Christ: the origin of life buried in the earth. For Jesus, to love is to serve and service is disappearing in the life of others, to die so as to give life.”<sup>3</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> St. Augustine, Sermon on the Pastors from the Office of Readings of Wednesday XXIV Week.

<sup>2</sup> Pranzato, p. 101.

<sup>3</sup> Canopi

Of course, we cannot think about grain, sacrifice, and death to give life without considering the Eucharist, the celebration that permits us to participate in the only sacrifice of Christ and food for our journey to the Father, the strength to carry our cross and the sacrament of complete union with Christ.

Bishop Roque recognized that importance and gave of himself unceasingly to assure that central prayer to hundreds of men and women at St. Luke and the Cathedral parishes, in the Army, in the medical centers of the Department of Veterans' Affairs, and elsewhere around the world. When he responded to the call to a vocation within a vocation as a military chaplain, he began to minister to a reality much larger than the noble Diocese of Providence, continuing at the same time the long tradition of this diocese in service to the larger Church.

Indeed celebrating this central moment of Christian life in this context we cannot miss the opportunity to apply this message to our experience; to us. What must we do to give life? We must continually learn to die to ourselves. What does that mean?

One answer is the domination of our pride, a source of much difficulty and death in the contemporary world. Pride blocks our ability to listen to each other, because we are already too busy with ourselves, with what we want to communicate: our desires, plans and interests. Sometimes we do not recognize the right or the contribution of the other because we are so convinced of our importance. We do not want to obey, because the other is like me.

Pride makes it difficult for us to grow in our knowledge and understanding, because we have to recognize our ignorance, need, or incapacity. Rather when we die to ourselves, we open a door for comprehension and growth. The fruit is abundant; harmony allows productivity, aggression is reduced, and the signs of the Kingdom are more evident.

Death to self is the avenue to that holy mountain described by the Prophet Isaiah where the Lord God will destroy death forever. We "should receive consolation and strength to face the death" of this Bishop, friend, uncle, great Uncle, and fellow traveler. We might also learn from his example how to keep the light of our baptism burning brightly and how to help others find the path to life, as well.

As you know, I only met Bishop Roque eleven years ago when my mandate as the fourth Archbishop for the Military Services began. Officially, he was already retired, but he continued to serve in so many ways. In fact, he was ever-ready to meet an obligation, to fill-in, and to contribute generously to the global archdiocese entrusted to my pastoral care. Consequently, allow me to end as I began, thanking the Roque Family and the Diocese of Providence for your generosity in giving up such a fine priest. May he now enjoy that blessedness and the fullness of life to which he guided so many others.

It is an honor to read a message of condolence addressed to me in the name of the Bishop of Rome:

"The Holy Father was saddened to learn of the death of former Auxiliary Bishop Francis X. Roque, and he offers heartfelt condolences to you and to the clergy, religious,

and lay faithful of the Archdiocese. Grateful for the late Bishop's years of priestly and episcopal service, and for his devoted pastoral care for veterans and chaplains, His Holiness commends his soul to the merciful love of our Heavenly Father. To all present at the Mass of Christian Burial and who mourn Bishop Roque's passing, the Holy Father cordially imparts his Apostolic Blessing as a pledge of peace and consolation in the Lord.

Signed

Cardinal Pietro Parolin  
Secretary of State