

Archbishop Timothy P. Broglio
Father Capodanno Memorial Mass
(Thursday 2 of XXII Week of Year)



My dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

It is curious that among scores of Navy Chaplains, two have received the Congressional Medal of Honor, Father Joseph Callahan and the Servant of God, Father Vincent Capodanno, whose memory we celebrate this evening in this Basilica dedicated to the Mother of God. I suppose that they embody what it means to be a chaplain in this great Nation founded on principles. They were men who never forgot the specificity of what they brought to others as Catholic priests and yet still served all who sought their counsel, comfort, and ministry.

A happy coincidence allows us to hear Saints Paul and Luke enrich our understanding about the challenge of discipleship and the richness of life in Christ—all with the example of Father Vincent Capodanno.

Indeed the word of God this evening invites us to depart from the narrowness of human limits so as to be in better shape to embrace the infinity of divine love. To live in Christ in the totality of His revelation to us includes the commitment to assume the newness of life, which Christ preached and announced with His cross. The ability to move beyond our limits has always been and remains a challenge for us.

The Corinthians were so talented. Their charisms attracted attention. Easily, they began to consider these gifts a possession, something that set them apart, and a source of pride. Paul had to remind them continually that divine gifts have only one finality—to be shared with others; to be used to build up the Body of Christ. An Apostle is a servant of the Gospel. We are all called to make our unique contributions to the construction of the Body of Christ. We are all pieces of the mosaic and together we achieve the purpose established by Christ.

For Peter the miraculous catch of fish represents a new beginning. He discovers who Christ is and also sees the reality of his own condition. "Depart from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man. He recognizes his own unworthiness and steps back. However, the

Lord has another plan. He has drawn Peter with the miracle from the ordinary conception of things. He recognized that Jesus overcomes the human level; his fear purified him and freed him from purely human, limited reasoning.

It is that realization that permitted a Father Capodanno to defy logic and remain under fire to minister to those entrusted to his pastoral care. He knew that he brought them something no other chaplain could, the healing presence of the Risen Lord who entrusted His sacraments, His life, to the Church. It was that same experience that inspired him to enter Maryknoll and leave homeland for the foreign missions. He knew how to recognize the presence of the Lord and to respond to the call that came from the same Lord.

It was indeed that same perception of the Lord's will that inspired him to leave missions to care for the Marines. Father Daniel Mode, the author of the definitive work about Father Capodanno, says that the spirit of Maryknoll can be seen in the missionary who "goes where he is needed but not wanted and stays until he is wanted, but not needed." Father Capodanno apparently felt that he was no longer needed in Hong Kong or Taiwan and would be of more use in Vietnam.¹

Indeed here we perceive one of those reasons for which we strive to learn more about Father Capodanno's life so as to propose him as a model of Christian living. Is not every day a new beginning for a believer, because it is a day to be at the service of Christ, ready to accomplish His will? That newness is also at the service of the whole world, which is enriched by the life, witness, and service of Christians.

The Gospel is radical. It speaks to us about a personal option to follow Christ, but also decision to separate oneself from everything which in one way or another could diminish the power of the adhesion to Jesus Christ. That was a challenge for Father Capodanno raised in a close-knit Italian family. It had not been easy to leave home and go for studies in Chicago. It could not have been easy to say farewell to his parents and head off for the Far East as a missionary and later as a chaplain. Clearly the gain was much greater than what was left behind, but that does not mean that it was without pain or challenges.

The fisherman Peter illustrates this experience of moving from the deception of a night of fruitless toil to the confidence of a miraculous catch. He was an expert fisherman and so resolved to accept that it had not been a good day. No doubt it was not the first time, but he was surprised by abundance of fish brought about by the counsel of a carpenter's Son. He had to set aside his knowledge and trust in another. Often our situation requires a similar adjustment. In our choices and decisions—how much space is there for the Lord?

As I mentioned Peter recognizes his sinfulness, his need of the Lord, and his inadequacy. How often has that been our case? How often do we see that the task is

¹ Daniel L. Mode, *The Grunt Padre*, p. 56.

bigger than our meager preparation? Then we look beyond the charisms of the Corinthians and our own self-sufficiency to adopt an attitude of trust in the Lord.

In his awareness of the lacunae, Peter experiences the transformation of his mission. He is charged with the service of leading others to Christ. His vocation in part is common to all of us in confirmation. At that time we accept our adult responsibility to build up the Body of Christ. It is a challenge, but it constitutes the Christian vocation. That is one reason why we honor the saints, because they teach us how to reveal Christ to others. They inspire us to grow in our commitment to the Lord Jesus and remind us that each one of us has been endowed with what he or she needs in order to follow Christ and show others the way to life in Him.

For this reason Paul denounces the blindness of Corinthians who try to play one evangelist against another. They forget that each person is important and each one has unique gifts and a special vocation in the Body of Christ. The construction of barriers closes us to God and separates us from others. So he wrote to those faithful at Corinth: “all belong to you, and you to Christ, and Christ to God.”²

Men and women like Father Capodanno, afire with the love of Christ, challenge us to live the Gospel and to teach all people to live as brothers and sisters. The quest for peace still stirs our hearts. As an Archdiocese charged with the pastoral care of Catholics in the various branches of the Armed Services, we long for the day when all people will live in harmony and recognize their common bond as created in the image and likeness of God. It is an ardent longing and it bids us to take the extra step, go the extra mile, and learn from the example of exceptional people like Father Capodanno, who still show us the way.

The Nation recognized his service with a medal. We pray fervently, however, that the Lord has already received him into the Kingdom of light and we beg a sign of that favor. It is for us. He needs no honor. The prayer for his canonization is not for him, but for us who desperately need an abundance of men and women in his mold. The confidence that the Servant of God Vincent Capodanno dwells with God would offer us additional inspiration to “Put out into deep water and lower [our] nets for a catch.”³ So often the Servant of God Pope John Paul II urged us to take that step and transform our world and this new century into a more fitting and clear sign of God’s love for us. We pray to be filled up with that spirit of Father Capodanno so that our fears of putting out into the deep will be allayed and our world will be renewed.

² 1 Cor.3:23b.

³ Lk. 5:4.