

Archbishop Timothy P. Broglio
Memorial Mass for Father Capodanno
Tuesday XXII-2



A few weeks ago there was a special program dedicated to the late Father Vincent Capodanno. For the most part those who spoke were Marines who had served with him, including those with him when he was killed by enemy fire. It was impressive to listen to their testimony and to hear their tributes to a priest who gave his all both in life and in death for those he was called to serve.

In that context the word of God instructs us about our pilgrimage through life and invites us to consider the mind of God, to speak with authority and to live authentically so as to promote lasting peace.

How do we know the mind of God? Paul offers us an explanation in his first Letter to the Christian community at Corinth. He assures us that no one on his own can know and understand God or the mystery of salvation, which He wants to give us. Everything is grace. Through Christ and especially with the gift of the Spirit we know a bit more and can say something about God.

If we recall the prophet Isaiah who in a section of the fortieth chapter poetically tells us that no one can say that he knows the thoughts of God.¹ However, in the passage just before the one we heard in the first reading, St. Paul rather freely cites Third Isaiah: "What no eye has seen and no ear has heard, what the mind of man cannot visualize; all that God has prepared for those who love Him."² In other words: divine benevolence has permitted that which is humanly impossible. A new way of knowing has been opened for us.

With the gifts of Christ and the overshadowing of Holy Spirit, we experience a new horizon in which we can know what pleases God and experience an interior joy. We also "have the mind of Christ."³ We are illuminated by the light of the Gospel about that which pleases God, simple because it is true. To possess the way that Christ thinks is an expression charged with apocalyptic meaning, i.e. revelatory and must not be understood only in terms of ethics. It is an expression, which speaks about the effect of the divine life within us through baptism and fortified by the Holy Spirit in confirmation.

¹ Cf. Is. 40:12ff.

² 1Cor.2:9.

³ 1Cor.2:16b.

Otherwise we cannot understand the figure of the Servant of God whom we remember this evening. What motivated him was much more than a series of regulations or military precision. If that were the case, he would never have been at the front attending to Corpsman Leal and the others.

Indeed he was specifically assigned to the 1st Battalion, “but he had to serve all the battalions in the 7th Marines, because he **was the only Catholic chaplain** in the regiment.”⁴ I guess it is as if you were the only medical specialist in a regiment, you would have to move around, as well!

We see how Christ thinks and speaks in the Gospel passage of today’s Mass. He goes to Capernaum to teach and heal and thereby shows His authority. Words and actions are the fabric which connects the entire Gospel. This event represents the beginning of His public ministry in the Gospel of St. Luke. He leaves Nazareth and begins to bring the message of salvation to others. He wants to be heard and welcomed by each person, and by the whole person. Therefore, He speaks to his or her heart and also heals the body. His efficacy this evening is an intervention to assure authentic liberation.

The first liberation is always from sin. We see the Lord in combat: face to face with the enemy. Satan speaks in revelation about the identity of Jesus Christ, but he is powerless before him. In classical terms the reaction of evil and the bystanders is *tremendum et fascinans* in the face of the mystery of God. When we allow the power of Almighty God to seize us and to influence what we do and say, then we are truly sons and daughters of a loving Father.

Jesus’ teaching comes from the divine source and has authority, power, and efficacy. He is not limited to commentaries as would be the rabbinic tradition of His time. He does not speak based on the authority of others. He is not concerned about an adverse reaction or political correctness. His is the voice of truth and that must also be the voice of those who follow Him and bear the name of Christian.

It is clear that the devil must leave the one possessed when the Lord commands. We who follow Him also experience the power of His word. Father Capodanno obviously experienced it. Otherwise, we would not be here this evening. The aging men who served with him would not make the journey. We have been moved by his example. BG Draude would not have prayed for his intercession and the religious woman from Vietnam would not attribute her cure to his intervention. In fact, this evening Father Tran will present the AMS with an image of Our Lady of LaVang to remind us of that cure.

The Lord still urges us to call upon His Name to expel the demons in our world today. Unfortunately, their number is legion. There is, however, an effective weapon within the reach of each one of us. We are told in the Gospel that news of Him spread everywhere in the surrounding region.

⁴ Rev. Daniel Mode, *The Grunt Padre*, p. 76 (emphasis is mine).

When we live authentically, we spread the Gospel. I selected a votive Mass for the preservation of peace and justice, because those intentions well up in the hearts of the men and women who are served by this global Archdiocese. While many remain unaware, so many still suffer the effects of the longest war in our history. As we remember and pray for the eternal repose of Father Capodanno, we cannot forget those he served and how he served.

We are told that for some days while away from his “home” battalion, Father Capodanno was like his Master, with no place to lay his head. Major Edward Fitzgerald offered him space in his tent. The other occupant was not too thrilled about the idea of a priest sharing his space and so he tacked up inappropriate pictures around the priest’s cot. No word about them came out of the priest’s mouth. The other officer finally came to his senses and took the pictures down.⁵ Effective, silent witness will always further the Gospel and it is always within our reach.

There are other times when we must speak and denounce injustice and immorality. Mediocrity and the least common denominator are not virtues. Meditating on the word of life allows it to become a light for our life. We never have to give that witness on our own, because we bear Christ within us. We have been transformed in baptism. We experience the efficacy of the sacrament of penance when we hear that word which frees us from sin. In the Eucharist His word transforms bread and wine into His Body and Blood to nourish us for the pilgrimage of life.

Indeed the Lord tells us: “The words I have spoken to you are spirit and they are life.”⁶ The many who spoke on that television program experienced first-hand the spirit and life that filled the Servant of God, Father Vincent Capodanno. May we also continue his Maryknoll missionary spirit, his Marine courage, and his absolute fidelity to his ministry as a priest in service to all!

⁵ Cfr. *Ibid.*

⁶ Jn. 6:63b.