

Archbishop Timothy P. Broglio, J.C.D.
Father Capodanno Memorial Mass
Wednesday 1 of Week XXII



Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ here before me and through the assistance of the Eternal Word Network,

This crozier seemed a good one to bring this evening. It is very simple. I have others and the Basilica does, as well. This one has a little history. It was made at an air base in the Middle East.

I was due there for a Christmas visit to the men and women deployed in the Middle East. My route to the Middle East took me through a very snowy Frankfurt Airport and my suitcase with a crozier stayed there for a week despite the best efforts of the energetic Catholic priest at the first stop and his chaplain assistant.

Word reached the priest at the penultimate destination that the Archbishop would be delivered from the USS Abraham Lincoln in time for Christmas, but perhaps without crozier. Like all good chaplains, he was well-known on base. I would imagine that Father Capodanno was the same way. With a sketch of crozier from a catalogue, the machinists assured the chaplain: "oh, we can do it, Father".

Is that not a typical response of those for whom the care and concern of a shepherd is evident? Is that not the pastor's role? He finds his sheep where they work or play or eat. They know him and are certain that he is there for them.

This evening the pastoral love and example of Jesus Christ leap out from the pages of Luke's Gospel and Paul reminds us that we build on the work of others. That is why the Servant of God, Father Vincent Capodanno's memory has called us forth this evening as we pray for the repose of his soul on the forty-sixth anniversary of his death.

In today's Gospel Jesus demonstrates His immense love. He cures Peter's mother-in-law and the word gets out. "At sunset, all who had people sick with various diseases brought them to Him." He takes time with each one and cures them. The image offers us a beautiful example of pastoral care. It is the Good Shepherd who reaches out to care for those in need.

This classic passage about pastoral care is made visible so often in Pope Francis' outreach to sick, disabled, and children. We notice that they have come at sunset. We

might be tempted to react: night has come, leave me alone, I am tired, come back during office hours. However, the Lord receives them all and restores order by healing their infirmities, casting out their demons, and giving them the power to walk away restored.

Is that not why you, fellow Marines of Father Capodanno, have joined us tonight? Some of you have journeyed to be here. You cannot forget the shepherd who was there for you.

The Lord Jesus makes reality the kingdom of God announced by the prophets and awaited so long by the Chosen People. His healing produces that peace for which the Lord seeks: with self, neighbors, environment, and even enemies. We long for that same peace and it is our earnest prayer as we respond to the appeal by Pope Francis to pray in a particular way for peace in the Middle East.

The crowd presses Him to stay with them after He has spent time in prayer. Their attitude is not far from that of those of Nazareth who wanted to take possession of Him for profit or enjoyment. The Lord is not a crowd pleaser, but one conscious of His duty, His mission. "I must proclaim the good news of the Kingdom of God to the other towns."

That is the constant tension in pastoral ministry: where do I best use my time and talents, what furthers the mission? It is the mission that is central and not merely my career, promotion, whatever. To receive the Lord Jesus means to open my heart with generous love. Anyone, young or old, who meets Jesus is inevitably destined to change and to be led to the service of others. That was certainly the experience of Peter's mother-in-law.

That explains why we are here tonight, because one way or another, directly or indirectly, we have been touched by the life and ministry of the Servant of God, Vincent Capodanno.

"This dynamic attitude on the part of Jesus reveals to the world the stupendous generosity of God. Divine love is without boundaries, it does not accept limits, seeks to save all. It seeks out even its own enemies in order to propose reconciliation and unity."¹ Father Capodanno illustrates that ministry of being all things to all. After all 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."² I guess it is as if you were the only medical specialist in a regiment, you would have to move around, as well!

It is the same dynamism that we experience in the first reading. Paul rejoices because the Gospel has spread and its fruit is evident in the whole known world. The demands of love have sent forth Christian missionaries. Paul is enthusiastic as he wrote to the community at Colossae, a community not evangelized by him and not visited by him.

¹ Albert Vanhoye, *Il Pane quotidiano della Parola*, p. 629.

² Rev. Daniel Mode, *The Grunt Padre*, p. 76 (emphasis is mine).

That fact perhaps explains why he begins his text with the longest and most complete formula of gratitude in the whole New Testament. While he must recognize the importance of those who first evangelized there, he stresses his solicitude and affection. The words and deeds of the Lord Jesus we heard in the Gospel reveal the universality of authentic love. That is why Paul can rejoice in this community and its faith.

However, his role as Apostle means that he must not be blind to the dangers that face the community. There at Colossae the danger consists in a tendency towards syncretism. The gnosis of those whose origins are pagan and the tendency toward strict observance of Jewish dietary laws and circumcision on the part of those whose origins are in the Chosen People could create a hybrid Catholicism. Paul must caution against that danger and so he resumes the Trinitarian and Christocentric elements of the whole economy of salvation.

The complete message of salvation defines the role of the Apostle and his successors. For this reason the Catholic Church has long been concerned about caring for the souls of the men and women in uniform. For example there is evidence of permanent pastoral care for the armies of Spain as early as 1645

In this country there is a long history of pastoral care supported both by the Federal and local governments and by organizations like the Knights of Columbus. The stories of great priest chaplains are many. The O'Callaghans, Kapauns, and Capodannos are joined by many others who quite simply took the Gospel to heart and brought the Shepherd's care to the men and women they served. It is not hard to imagine Father Capodanno being able to obtain something he needed even in the jungles of Vietnam, because he would have known his Marines and they trusted him. They knew that he was there for them.

Certainly, the Catholics would have known that he brought them something no other Chaplain could, the sacraments. All of them, however, would have known his care, interest, and his presence. They were probably not surprised on that Labor Day in the midst of a terrible battle of Operation "Swift" near Dinh An to find Father Capodanno there. He was completely dedicated to the spiritual care of his Marines.

This annual gathering is to pray for him and to recall his pastoral service as a model for chaplains and priests in general. The Cause for his canonization is not for him, but for us. Others should know of his dedication and his desire to serve others. His was a response filled with faith to the Master who laid down His life for the sheep. For this reason, as I mentioned, the Archdiocese for the Military Services, USA, has established the Capodanno Guild, the only organization authorized to serve as the petitioner for and supporter of his Cause. It will raise funds to meet the expenses of the collection of data, the interviews of those who knew the Servant of God, and the other requirements for the advancement of the Cause.

On October 1st at the Pastoral Center there will be a formal opening of the Cause to meet the canonical requirements of this careful process. I am very grateful to those who

have supported and will continue to support this important project of the Archdiocese for the Military Services and the Capodanno Guild.

Good chaplains accomplish things “in and out of the box”. May the life and legacy of Vincent Capodanno, Maryknoll priest, Marine Chaplain, and devoted servant of others continue to inspire men and women to imitate the Lord Jesus, take stock of their gifts, and get up and serve.