

Archbishop Timothy P. Broglio
Memorial Mass for Father Capodanno
4 September 2014



My first nuncio told me that you can always learn something from your superiors: either how to do something or how not to do it. In my more than thirteen years as an Archbishop I have always tried to remember that principle. It came to mind as I read Pau's advice to the Corinthians: "Let no one boast about human beings".

It becomes apparent as one reads Msgr. DiGiovanni's account of Father Capodanno's interaction with his immediate superior in Taiwan that things were not going well. He was not at peace with his transfer to Hong Kong, which, based on his experience ministering to Navy and Marine personnel in Taiwan, led to his request to become a Navy chaplain. The inscrutable ways of Providence, which "knows that the thoughts of the wise are vain", brought the Servant of God to the Navy and, for that reason, gathered us here this evening.

This is not the first time that we listen to Saints Paul and Luke who enrich our understanding about the challenge of discipleship and the richness of life in Christ at this gathering in which we pray for the repose of the soul 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. It seems so appropriate as we gather in prayer for this good chaplain that we also beg the Lord of the universe for a time of peace and understanding among nations.

Peter and the others are expert fishermen. They have been actively engaged in catching fish since they could walk. Had they allowed their skepticism at the Lord's command to try again take hold of them, everyone would have understood. Experience is always the safe spot for our decisions. We are comfortable with what we know. Peter, however, welcomes the word of the Lord and believes in its efficacy. Jesus says *duc in altum* and Peter obeys. He knows better than this carpenter's son, but he obeys.

What happens? There is a miraculous catch of fish, so great that the boat is in danger of sinking. The greater miracle, however, is one that all of us have experienced. We meet Christ and our conscience is opened. Peter sees himself and recognizes that he is a sinner. He confesses his condition and fears that it is too dark for him to remain with the Lord. "Depart from me for I am a sinful man." Who, after all, except the Blessed Virgin Mary, can stand blameless in the presence of the Lord?

It is the common condition for all of us. Who was not surprised when Pope Francis identified himself as a sinner when Father Spadaro asked him who he was? It is not the first thing that came to our minds in trying become acquainted with the Holy Father. Yet, it clearly identifies our common condition.

However, the encounter cannot end there. There is a mission. Meeting the Lord Jesus and recognizing the poverty of our condition have an immediate social dimension. Peter must reach out to others and bring them to the same experience. Vincent Capodanno died, because he believed that. You and I, dear brothers and sisters, also know that our baptism and especially the grace of our confirmation urge us to go forth and introduce Jesus Christ to every other human person.

This new encounter with the Lord and Savior of humanity represented a new beginning for Peter. He saw himself and appreciated Christ. Each new day is a new beginning for a Catholic. It is an invitation to live at the Lord's service as we begin each day with His word. Does our daily existence seem routine, humdrum? Do we tire of what seems to be the same?

Is that one of the reasons why heroes are so important? They inspire us to go out into the deep, to realize our potential, and to embrace the challenge of professing Christ Jesus as Lord even in the midst of a secular and materialist society. They challenge us to make His Name known despite the opposition.

The Lord did not leave Peter in the reflection about his own sinfulness. He did not depart, because Peter was the rock on which He would build the Church! How important it is for us to recognize, cultivate, and honor the dignity of each human person—not in terms of his or her practical "usefulness", but because each one is created in the image and likeness of God, has a vocation to sanctity, and has been endowed with a participation in the mission of Christ.

When the Church raises her voice in defense of that dignity, she is merely imitating the Master who laid down His life so that we, sinners of all time, might have eternal life. Is that not what the Servant of God affirmed when he consoled that wounded Marine and reassured him? Is that not why he brought that unique sacramental presence of Christ to the front lines, even at the expense of his own life?

Listening this morning on EWTN to Ray Horton's account of Father Capodanno's last minutes I was struck by the peace that Father brought to Mr. Horton. The priest's last recorded words were of blessing and consolation for another. He then went to consol

Corpsman Leal and was fatally wounded. That serenity and concern are clearly signs of the presence of God.

If we seek to make the mystery of Father Capodanno's life and ministry known, it is to provoke imitation. It is to call us to the courage to go out into the deep and to raise our voices in witness to the dignity of the human person. Indeed, having met Christ, we can always discover something new: the word of God, a spark, a new vision, another sign of God's care. That can also be our gift to others, just as we see what happens when the Apostles act on the Lord's word. Obviously, however, we have to perceive the importance of the power and authority of that word.

Finally the Gospel tells us that they left all and followed Him. That is a radical response on a personal level, but also in the decision to distance oneself from everything, which in one way or another could diminish the power of my decision to adhere to Jesus.

More important than leaving everything—radical and provocative as it sounds—is finding the ultimate and definitive center of my life, which is Jesus Christ. As Victor Frankl wrote, when you have a determining goal in life any “how” can be resolved. Or in other words when you decide in favor of Jesus Christ, every other decision flows from that first one.

Indeed we can always learn. The midshipmen here tonight pursue an education for eventual service to our Nation. Their vocation right now is that of a student. However, that remains the vocation of each one of us as we move through life and grow in our relationship with the Lord of all. May the example of the Servant of God, Vincent Capodanno, inspire all of us.