

**Archbishop Timothy P. Broglio, J.C.D.**  
**Mass for Father Capodanno**

(Tuesday, 6.IX.16; Week XXIII; 2Cor. 5:1, 6-10; Ps. 149; Lk. 6:12-9)



This year I have been telling the story of Father Capodanno to introduce my homilies for confirmation. I briefly summarize his vocation to Maryknoll, his pastoral service in Asia, and then his entrance to the Navy Chaplaincy, and death on the battlefield with his Marines. The purpose of the introduction is to ask a rhetorical question: Did Father Capodanno wake up on the morning of 4 September 1967 and decide to be a man for others?

Obviously, the answer is negative. All of us know that we respond to the situations of our lives based on decisions and preparations made before and the sacramental grace within us. The military trains its members so that they have a depth of experience and practice on which to draw when the unexpected arises. The remarkable representatives of the Armed Forces here this evening know all about self-sacrifice and service. Those ordained to the priesthood dedicate at least four or five years of post-graduate study and formation to minister to those entrusted to our care. We have been infused with the grace of the sacrament of orders to fulfill our calling. The athletes who just participated in the Olympics had trained for a long time to be ready for their events. The same is true for so many professions and vocations.

This evening, inspired by this man for others, we gather to pray for the repose of his soul, consider the importance of prayer, and reflect again on the Cause for his canonization.

St. Luke tells us that Jesus passed the night in prayer before selecting His Apostles. This intimate dialogue with the Father was necessary before He chose His closest co-workers. We see Jesus at prayer in so many of the most crucial moments of His life. His union with the Father is constant and He teaches us the way to make decisions. We

cannot make good decisions without entering into communion with God. With Him nothing is impossible; without Him nothing can be done.

The prayer of the Lord Jesus for us to the Father is uninterrupted. As the author of Hebrews reminds us: "... He is always able to save those who approach God through Him, since He lives forever to make intercession for them"<sup>1</sup> and is our Advocate before the Father (1Jn. 2:1)

Prayer, therefore, is the key that opens the door to vocation. We all have that Christian vocation which Paul describes so eloquently in his Letter to the Colossians: "As you received Christ Jesus the Lord, walk in Him, rooted in Him and built upon Him and established in the faith as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving."<sup>2</sup>

"Everyone in the crowd sought to touch Him because power came forth from Him and healed them all." The source of the power to heal is the night in prayer. There is no coincidence between the two. Prayer was also the prelude to the important choice: selection of the Apostles.

Think of the role of prayer in Father Capodanno's life. It was his guide in responding to the Lord's call to Maryknoll. It must have guided his discernment of the vocation within a vocation: military chaplaincy. "Every decision, each action, and every meeting must be lived in the light that we have drawn from a constant, humble, and trusting prayer."<sup>3</sup> Another fruit of that prayer must have been his dogged insistence to stay at the front with his Marines. He was clearly a man for others who imitated the Lord in that most generous sacrifice of life itself to give consolation and healing to others in peril.

He is a good figure for this extraordinary Holy Year of Mercy that Pope Francis has given to the Church. Does he not incarnate that mercy as he darts about the field of battle to console the wounded and offer them the sacraments that only he can bring? Is his not an authentic interpretation of the man for others who brings mercy and consolation to the afflicted and tried?

He also managed to be where he was needed. It was pointed out that he died on the field of battle with a battalion different from his own. When an interviewer many years later asked how he managed to ride the helicopter to the battlefield, a lance corporal explained: "He was a Catholic priest. I would not have said no to him and I am sure that the pilot of that helicopter would not have denied him a ride either."

Just on Sunday we rejoiced in the canonization of St. Teresa of Calcutta, because her incredible charity brought mercy to the most destitute members of our human family. Her service to the poorest of the poor made waves across the globe. She was audacious, as well. Either she made us uncomfortable, because of her authentic witness or she renewed us in our loving response to the neighbor in need.

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<sup>1</sup> Heb.7:25.

<sup>2</sup> Col. 2:6.

<sup>3</sup> Albert Vanhoye, *Il Pane Quotidiano della Parola*, p. 646.

She, like Father Capodanno, reaffirmed the dignity of the human person. With silent witness these figures teach us to open our eyes and meet the needs of others. They teach us to be ministers of mercy. They teach that no one is unimportant.

Pope Francis tells us: “We need constantly to contemplate the mystery of mercy. It is a wellspring of joy, serenity, and peace. Our salvation depends on it. Mercy: the word reveals the very mystery of the Most Holy Trinity. Mercy: the ultimate and supreme act by which God comes to meet us. Mercy: the fundamental law that dwells in the heart of every person who looks sincerely into the eyes of his brothers and sisters on the path of life. Mercy: the bridge that connects God and man, opening our hearts to the hope of being loved forever despite our sinfulness.”<sup>4</sup>

As we gather to pray for the repose of the soul of Father Capodanno we also long to see his name inscribed in the album of saints. I had to smile when I read the headline of a well-known national newspaper: “Pope Francis to make Mother Teresa saint”. No, that is not in his job description. He inscribed her name in the album, the list, of saints. God opened His “arms” to welcome her into heaven, because she corresponded to His loving call.

It is our earnest hope that Father Capodanno’s name will one day be inscribed in that same album so that he can be held up as a model for believers everywhere. That is also a part of our prayer this evening. In fact everyone is invited to invoke his intercession for particular needs. The positive response is then eventually used to buttress the process of confirming his presence in heaven.

4 September 1967 was a confirmation of many decisions that Vincent Capodanno made throughout his life. May his powerful example confirm us in our faith, inspire our decisions to make a difference in our world, and lead us to share in eternal life.

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<sup>4</sup> Pope Francis, *Misericordiae vultus*, 2.