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Homily at the Memorial Mass for the Servant of God Father Vincent Capodanno

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Watching the new documentary about Father Capodanno juxtaposed with the images of flood victims and rescuers dealing with the ravages of Harvey, I was struck by the ability of the human person to respond to situations of crisis. Certainly, chaplains, first responders, and medical personnel are trained to react to challenges, but what about all of those other people who met the demands of an emergency with native skills, good will, and the tools at hand?

The powerful Word of God heard just now offers a global response that also fits the worldview of Father Capodanno: Missionary disciples spread the word about Jesus Christ everywhere, are vigilant, and receive the final goal, to dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

“Therefore, let us not sleep as the rest do, but let us stay alert and sober [, because] the day of the Lord will come like a thief at night.” (1Th. 5: 6a; 2b)

St. Paul must address a concrete situation in Thessalonica, where the Gospel met with a good measure of welcome. However, the society there cultivates a notion of leisure devoid of meaning. There is no expectation on the part of the pagan world of a judgment. Their attitude contrasts with that of the children of light, who have a wider perspective and await the day of judgment. Waiting for this impending moment and living in preparation for what will come when we know neither the day nor the hour is the characteristic of the believer as a child of light. For this reason, unlike the others, they do not fear death, the moment of reunion, the gateway to life without end.

No one could risk his life and ultimately be killed to meet the spiritual needs of the Marines if he or she did not believe in the promise of the Kingdom. Father Capodanno brought those unique gifts of the sacraments under fire, because his first concern was to dwell in the house of God forever. You and I want his life and death known, because we believe his example will invite others to stay awake, prepare for the day of the Lord, and be men and women for others.

The celebration of the greatness of a figure gone before us is implicitly an invitation to imitate the virtues of that individual. Father Capodanno teaches us the value of commitment and belief. He invites us to give our all in the pursuit of our vocation which is the path the Lord has set for us to share in the joy of His Kingdom.

Certainly, the concept of eternal life is not one that seems to weigh on the imagination of the men and women of our time. The contemporary mentality is anchored firmly on today and the desire to have everything right now. "Buy now and pay later" has become the theme of many in our society. Perhaps those this global Archdiocese is privileged to serve ask some deeper questions, because they can easily look death in the face, but the secular culture often clouds those fundamental concerns.

Blessed Paul VI offered an excellent reflection on the importance of making use of our time with the goal of eternal life clearly in evidence. "And then an act, finally, of good will. Do not look back, but gladly, simply, humbly, and forcefully accomplish the duty stemming from the circumstances in which I find myself, as Your will.

Do it quickly. Do it all. Do it well. Do it joyfully. That is what you want from me, even if it far surpasses my strength and if it requires my life ultimately at this last hour."¹

The Gospel passage illustrates that the people of Capernaum notice that Jesus speaks with authority in the synagogue. He interprets the SS according to a new inspiration, revealing meanings heretofore unknown and inaugurates a new path which challenges consciences and provokes a decision. His speech differs from the other masters of His time. They always cited other rabbis, experts, or masters to justify and to prove the validity of their message. It was the common manner of Jewish preaching in Jesus' time.

He spoke with His own authority and surprised all with His conviction. Never had they heard anyone like Him. There were signs, but also evidence of an internal conviction. But He was known; He came from the town next door. How could this be?

That is the question that forever demands an answer. For centuries believers have tried to witness to their faith and to offer a response to that question. Just as the Gospel reminds us that the "news of Him spread everywhere in the surrounding region" so also does that good news continue to spread.

Father Vincent Capodanno gave evidence of that good news as a missionary in the Far East and then as a Navy Chaplain. He could not contain the news. His ability to listen, his desire to be there for others, his inspiration on the battle field, prayer for the enemy, and his attention to each person were all expressions of that Good News. He lived to dwell in the house of the Lord and his death was an invitation to others to come and to experience life in that house. He embodies a prayer written as a reflection on these passages:

¹ Paul VI, *Pensiero alla morte*, August, 1978: "E poi un atto, finalmente, di buona volontà: non più guardare indietro, ma fare volentieri, semplicemente, umilmente, fortemente il dovere risultante dalle circostanze in cui mi trovo, come Tua volontà.

"Fare presto. Fare tutto. Fare bene. Fare lietamente: ciò che ora Tu vuoi da me, anche se supera immensamente le mie forze e se mi chiede la vita. Finalmente, a quest'ultima ora."

“As the God of creation has placed a limit on the shadows that were in us, has marked forever their limit: he who loses his life to serve You, who entrusts his life to your Word, who renounces the honors of this world to follow you bears your light in him, lives your very life. Finally, as the divine Judge, you have taught us to fix our eyes on the eternal reality, to look beyond appearances, not to fear death, so as to live even now in the joy of our life with you.”²

The fiftieth anniversary of his heroic sacrifice and our first gathering since the completion of the archdiocesan phase in the canonization process fill us with hope. His story is told and retold, because his sacrifice made a difference in the lives of others and we believe that it will make a difference in the lives of those who learn about him. Canonization is indeed about that: a larger than life example that will inspire others to imitate him. His example can teach priests to meet the needs of others. His steadfast courage will always inspire men and women in uniform to accomplish their mission and care for their comrades. His gaze fixed on eternal life reminds all that there is one thing to ask of the Lord: to dwell in His house all the days of my life.

In the timeless message of Thomas à Kempis: “For those who do all the talking amount to nothing; they fail with their din of words, but the truth of the Lord endures forever”³ in the deeds of His servants.

In a world so filled with a selfish message that focuses on me, my needs, my fulfillment, and my view, a person for others dramatically states that this is not the only viable position and that others matter. The courage under fire exhibited by Father Capodanno points to eternal life, but also speaks nobly about the dignity of every human person, even those who do not agree with us. Understanding of that fundamental value must be renewed, lest we fall into the trap of racism, isolationism, or the denigration or silencing of those who do not agree with us. If we always see in the other a fellow wayfarer, one loved by Almighty God and a neighbor, we can reduce the tensions in our world.

Pope Francis expressed it so well in his teaching on the joy of the Gospel: “Thanks solely to this encounter – or renewed encounter – with God’s love, which blossoms into an enriching friendship, we are liberated from our narrowness and self-absorption. We become fully human when we become more than human, when we let God bring us beyond ourselves in order to attain the fullest truth of our being. Here we find the source and inspiration of all our efforts at evangelization. For if we have received the love which restores meaning to our lives, how can we fail to share that love with others?”⁴

Paul urges the Thessalonians to be prepared to welcome the Lord. Father Capodanno teaches us that preparation is possible. The ravages of Harvey remind us that the opportunities to respond in concrete situations are always present. How shall we respond?

² Zevini and Cabra, *Lectio divina*, 11, p. 217.

³ Imitation of Christ,

⁴ Pope Francis, *Evangelii gaudium*, 8.

