

Archbishop Timothy P. Broglio
Memorial Mass 2011
15.V.11



Archbishop Hannan tells the story of his arrival as a chaplain destined to a new position with the 82nd Airborne in France in 1944. He was walking alone in a trench coat and someone addressed him in German. He responded apologizing for his poor command of the language. The two Americans introduced themselves and told him that they were suspicious, because he was wearing a trench coat, one of the items stolen by the enemy. Rather than shoot, they decided to verify if he were German or not.

The poor quality of his response convinced them that he was not from the other side. He was grateful that his one year of German language study left him not so well-prepared.¹ It was recognition by exclusion, but a recognition nonetheless.

The sheep follow the Good Shepherd, “because they recognize His voice.” (Jn. 10:4b). This afternoon we gather as a believing community to honor the Good Shepherd who inspires the baptized to preach the Gospel decisively and clearly. We gather in this magnificent basilica dedicated to the Mother of God as a community desirous of an occasion to remember, pray, and give thanks for the sacrifices of many.

Jesus is everything for us: gate, shepherd, Lord, servant, God and man. The Church proclaims that Jesus is the mediator. No one goes to the Father except through Him (Jn.14:6). To reach God and have a personal relationship with Him, we must pass through Jesus, unite ourselves with Him.

To understand the definition of Jesus as door, we look to the first reading: one way to pass through the door is to be baptized and live as a Christian. The whole life of a Christian must be coherent with baptism. Everything must always pass through the door which is Christ. “Whoever enters through me will be saved, and will come in and go out and find pasture.” (Jn. 10:9).

The word for pasture is also the same for the courtyard of temple where people gather. There Jesus assumes His role as guide, unlike thieves and brigands. Everything in our lives related to others must always pass through Jesus. To raise their children, parents must pass through the door who is Jesus, i.e., must unite themselves with Him so as to be the best of teachers who show their children how to grow in the love of God, of neighbor, in honesty, and in giving thanks to God. All we do we do in union with the heart

¹ Cf. Philip Hannon, *The Archbishop Wore Combat Boots*, pp. 110-1.

of Jesus; or better all of this is the work of Jesus in which we participate. Only He leads to salvation and security. Only He leads to intimate communion with the Father.

Only Christ can say with the fullness of truth that He “never needed evidence about anyone; He could tell what someone had within.” (Jn. 2:25). “He is the good Shepherd of humanity. There is no human value that He has failed to respect, elevate and save. There is no human suffering that He has not understood, shared, and raised to a new value.”²

Yet in our world with the siren call of its attractions, the incessant appeal to self-interest, and the inordinate importance attached to material goods, it is difficult to recognize His voice as the authentic Pastor who invites us to leave behind the straits of our selfishness and provincialism to introduce us to the Kingdom of authentic liberty. Our entire existence depends on our decision to listen, follow, and enter to dwell with Jesus. Indeed the prayer of the Church is always made through Jesus.

Good Shepherd Sunday, as today is popularly known, reminds us that Jesus is the universal mediator, the only one capable of realizing true unity among humanity. We are called to be united to His heart and thus find our way to God. Without Him our life is sterile or even evil.

Peter’s baptismal homily, from which we heard in the second reading, refers to the privilege and new identity from baptism that require a new mentality and a way of living that conforms to Christ. Through baptism we all become foreigners and pilgrims in this world and servants of God. We are called to follow Him, pass through Him—do as He has done. That may mean enduring suffering with patience. It is clearly a call to imitate generosity of Jesus.

In that context the Archdiocese for the Military Services gathers to remember, to pray, and to give thanks for the sacrifices of many in the service of our Country. We think of so many who have died. We remember the wounded and those who are impaired in any way as a result of their generous service. I bring to the altar the names, which have been sent for this occasion. I cannot forget the young faces that I saw the other week at Bethesda or those last March in Landstuhl or those of the less young at BAMC or in the many Veterans’ Administration Hospitals I have visited. On Friday I was again struck by the rows of headstones at Arlington National Cemetery over the remains of generations of brave men and women, who have served their Country.

Their sacrifices and those of their families urge us to continue our prayers to the gracious Lord as we beg for peace, increased understanding among Nations, and the ability to dialogue in the resolution of differences. The Holy Father made that quite clear in his message for the World Day of Peace this year:

“Peace is a gift of God and at the same time a task which is never fully completed. A society reconciled with God is closer to peace, which is not the mere absence of war or

² Paul VI, homily on 28.IV.68.

the result of military or economic supremacy, much less deceptive ploys or clever manipulation. Rather, peace is the result of a process of purification and of cultural, moral and spiritual elevation involving each individual and people, a process in which human dignity is fully respected. I invite all those who wish to be peacemakers, especially the young, to heed the voice speaking within their hearts and thus to find in God the stable point of reference for attaining authentic freedom, the inexhaustible force which can give the world a new direction and spirit, and overcome the mistakes of the past.³

“Let the whole house of Israel know for certain that God has made both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified” (Acts 2: 36). Peter’s preaching is decisive and clear. He identifies Jesus as the Messiah, but there are no political overtones to that mission. In fact, He may well have been crucified, because the ultimate sense of His ministry was salvation, everlasting life. After his reception of the Spirit at Pentecost, Peter is not afraid to make those saving words known.

We, too, must be faithful to the Gospel and imitate the Good Shepherd by preaching the truth. The Gospel is not necessarily politically correct, but it is the word of life, sharper than any sword. It serves not to condemn, but to discern and to save. However, it must be made known. Any condemnation comes not from the word, but from the individual and his or her choices. Salvation is always a gift, as is the freedom to choose. Almighty God always respects His gifts. Indeed the only real slavery is to sin. It is a challenge to announce this message of life with courage and determination.

So often we live under the oppressive weight of the dictatorship of relativism, which stifles our courage and chokes the spirit within. We beg for the careful courage of the Good Shepherd: to call, to lead, and to remain ever faithful. We must recognize that those who do not enter by the door are thieves: dishonest, selfish, and corrupt.

Of course, we are in need of those who will preach the Gospel both to our Armed Forces and those in civilian life. The specificity of the ministry of Catholic priests—in persona Christi—in the military cannot be replaced by anyone else. Not all chaplains are the same. Indeed even the First Amendment recognizes that freedom of religion means allowing and providing access to all religions. Therefore, we recognize the importance of prayer. “Vocations to the ministerial priesthood and to the consecrated life are first and foremost the fruit of constant contact with the living God and insistent prayer lifted up to the ‘Lord of the harvest’, whether in parish communities, in Christian families or in groups specifically devoted to prayer for vocations.”⁴

Indeed the ability to foster vocations is the hallmark of the vitality of a local Church. Given that ten-percent of those ordained for the United States each year are prior service, the Archdiocese for the Military Services could say that she is healthy. Unfortunately,

³ Benedict XVI, Message for the World Day of Peace, 2011, n. 15.

⁴ Benedict XVI, Message for the World Day of Vocations, 2011.

forty-five priests do not join the ranks of the chaplains each year. We cannot, therefore, rest on our laurels. Our prayer must continue to be fervent.

Indeed we add that intention to our prayers this afternoon. We find ourselves in Mary's House during the month especially dedicated to her. What better moment can there be to ask her to intercede for us and send more vocations to the Church and more chaplains to the Armed Forces.

Archbishop Hannon's lack of facility in German assured his recognition. The Good Shepherd is also always recognized by His voice. We have listened to that voice and have gathered in prayer for our fallen, our wounded, and our future. O Good Shepherd, hear our prayer and lead us to salvation.