

**Archbishop Timothy P. Broglio, J.C.D.**  
Annual Father Vincent Capodanno Memorial Mass  
6 September 2022  
(1Cor. 6:1-11; Jn. 12:23-8)



Once on a visit to Washington, classmates and some friends who were living at Divine Word College took me to see the Vietnam Memorial. One of my classmates asked me if I knew anyone among the over 58,000 names of men and women who had shed their lives in that conflict. At the time I was able to say no, but still there was a desire on the part of all of us to pray for and honor those who had fallen.

Little did I know how much the former Divine Word College and the victims of the Vietnam War would become a part of my life. We gather this evening to pray for the Servant of God, Father Vincent Capodanno and to be challenged by the Sacred Scriptures, which speak to us about the effects of the Christian life and ultimate meaning of our pilgrimage. Father Capodanno teaches us a great deal about both.

It is useful to wonder what Paul might say about our litigious society today. He is always direct and wants to shake up his hearers. The message is clear: the faith in Jesus Christ is not a convention name tag that you put on for an event and then take off. It is a way of life that illuminates and inspires all of our actions. "Otherwise, one should deduce that the Christian faith of this community is absolutely incapable of orienting the life of believers and illuminate their decisions."<sup>1</sup>

Hence the important link between faith and life. There can be no dichotomy if one is to be an authentic member of the Church founded by Jesus Christ. Unfortunately, not a few try to make a distinction where none is possible.

The same is true of priestly identity. It does not change if I am wearing a collar, a golf shirt, or a uniform. Father Capodanno understood that very well and brought the fullness of his priesthood to his Marines, just as he had in Taiwan and Hong Kong. His priestly virtues sustained him throughout his life.

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<sup>1</sup> Zevini y Cabra, *Lectio Divina*, 7, p. 252.

St. Paul decries to that Corinthian community the absence of effective arbiters in their midst. You can hear the mixture of irony, sadness, and anger in this text—attributes not unknown in his other letters. His identification with the community compelled him to draw out the best that they had. His was also an invitation to reform.

The last part of passage is theological and emphasizes the main point: baptism is a great accomplishment that confers an entirely new gift. From that gift should flow a new life.<sup>2</sup> It is the logical conclusion of his thought and returns us to his legitimate expectations. So too, we should continually give thanks for our baptism and the potential it conferred. It was our entrance into death to sin so as to be reborn into eternal life.

Death that gives life seems an enigma, however we have many examples of the same reality: seeds, plants enrich the land, animals die to give us food; examples of history: police, patriots, and firefighters. In the military the examples abound. Father Capodanno's witness draws us here this evening. We can think of other Christians, as well: Maximilian Kolbe, Giana Beretta Molla, Father Kapaun to name but a few.

Christ, the grain of wheat that falls to the earth and dies teaches us to die to ourselves and helps us to understand the very mystery of death. As hard as modern society tries to hide death, it is the only threshold that opens up into eternal life. It is a necessary passage. Father Capodanno knew that and helped others to appreciate that truth, as well.

"On Calvary Christ will be stripped, they will take off His clothes, but this Gospel passage is the real disrobing. It is He Himself who takes off the armor. He appears weak, fragile, defenseless, and lost."<sup>3</sup> The grain of wheat that dies is the mystery of Christ.

Passage from St. John here really substitutes for the agony in the garden. Final temptation: should I ask the Father to save me from this hour? The cross already seems too heavy to bear even in thought. The filial obedience of Jesus glorifies the Name of the Father, because it reveals Trinitarian love. The sacrifice bears fruit: it realizes the salvation of the world.

Christ is the seed fallen into our dry earth. "No life is possible without fruit, and no fruit is possible without the death of the seed." His death to self leads to the glorification and the manifestation of His love for us. That is not a message particularly attractive to our society. We want our gratification now. We are not patient and we find looking ahead to eternal life very difficult.

Here we treat the very mystery of the mission of Jesus Christ and thus our salvation. "The vitality of the buried seed is prodigious," wrote an Italian Abbess. "The law of the seed is to die so as to multiply: there is no other meaning and no other function other than to offer service to [everlasting] life. The same is true for the self-emptying of

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<sup>2</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> Alessandro Pronzato, *Il Vangelo in Casa B*, p. 101.

Christ: the origin of life buried in the earth. For Jesus, to love is to serve and service is disappearing in the life of others, to die so as to give life.”<sup>4</sup>

Father Capodanno obviously understood that truth. He knew the risks when he in “persona Christi” brought the anointing of the sick, heard confessions, and offered that profound consolation to men facing death. How many of them chose to be there? Were they drafted? His was ministry to men in need, anxious, and uncertain about what the future held. He chose to be there! Only a man who firmly believed in eternal life could face a hail of bullets unarmed with no other purpose than to serve. Only a man profoundly committed to a life for others would have been there.

For this reason we honor his memory, but more importantly we want to make his unique contribution of giving his life for others known. The long process involved with his Cause for Canonization adds nothing to his reward, but it is useful for others. It is a vivid testimony to the truth about eternal life. It shows us what it means to give life. It was the response of a faithful missionary disciple who put himself where others needed him—regardless of the cost.

I hold out his example to the chaplains here, to the co-sponsored seminarians and deacons who hope to serve, and to all people of good will who want to follow Christ and seek the fullness of eternal life. The efforts to advance this Cause might entail consternation, but the effort is worthwhile, because his commitment, dedication, and authentic understanding of self-giving are needed in this world so often selfish and unable or unwilling to look beyond today.

Of course, we cannot think about grain, sacrifice, and death to give life without considering the Eucharist, the celebration that permits us to participate in the only sacrifice of Christ and food for our journey to the Father, the strength to carry our cross and the sacrament of complete union with Christ. Father Capodanno was the only chaplain who could bring that gift to his Marines. It becomes even more evident in this time of Eucharistic revival when we renew our faith in this life-giving presence of Jesus Christ in our midst.

Indeed what might be a page in history or a monument to the fallen takes on new meaning when the life behind the name can inspire others to greatness. For this reason we gather in prayer for a deceased great missionary and hope to make his name widely known.

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<sup>4</sup> Canopi