

Archbishop Timothy P. Broglio, J.C.D.
Father Capodanno Memorial Mass
5 September 2024



Just a few weeks ago the Church celebrated the memorial of St. Maximilian Kolbe, the Franciscan Friar who took the place of the father of a family in a death sentence at Auschwitz. He was canonized as a martyr—it would not be difficult to discover *odium fidei* in the doctrine of the Nazis.

Yet his was also a spontaneous gift of his life for another. The parallels to Father Vincent Capodanno's gift of self seem evident. This courageous chaplain we remember today was consistent in his gift of self: daily first as a missionary in far off lands and then in his service to the Marines, ultimately giving his life as he ministered to them on the battlefield. The gift of self for another led him to the ultimate sacrifice. This perfect prayer convokes us this evening as we beg divine mercy for his soul and ask, in the spirit of the Word of God proclaimed, for the grace to make manifest the way to Christ, use the gifts received for the service of others.

We might profit to think about the example of prayer shown us by the Lord Jesus. Despite the long day of ministering to the sick, receiving people, and dialoguing with them, He is up at daybreak and prays to the Father. In our active and full lives, we should not miss this divine example. We take time and enter into conversation with the Father. We are never too busy for prayer. In fact, it is here that we find the courage to move forward, to ask the difficult questions, and to make manifest the faith.

St. Paul helps us to keep everything in focus. These days the liturgy invites us to meditate on the sublime first Letter to the Corinthians whose first and second chapters dwell on the theology of the Cross and godly wisdom. Now moving into his third chapter in today's first reading, Paul considers the ramifications of these reflections in terms of Christian life. Concretely, the rivalries among the faithful in that talented community of Corinth indicate that the faithful have not yet grasped the depth of their new state.

They are almost like little children: “my Daddy is better than yours”. “My Christian pedigree is more noble.” After all, I was baptized by Apollo”. The spiritual immaturity here consists in envy, discord, and superficial questions. There has been no attempt to rise from merely human concerns. Paul develops a theology of apostolic ministry. Ministry means service and not a popularity contest. Almighty God is the source of all ministry and its result is the edification of the Church.¹ Identification with Paul or Apollo misses the point; it is Christ who calls, not the sowers or the waterers.

He reminds the Corinthians that growth in the faith is a constant. We never really arrive. We can still learn and engage in authentic conversion. He points out that the presence of envy and discord in the community demonstrate spiritual immaturity. They have not yet put Christ in the center and recognized that the instruments who introduced them to Him are merely that, instruments. It is Almighty God who gives growth, and no one less.

He reminds them and us that we are capable of great things. Is that not why we honor the saints and cultivate heroes? We can do little for Father Capodanno, but he inspired his Marines and now inspires many others as they learn about his life. That is the function of great men and women: to inspire us with their example and to show us the way to the fullness of our potential. They tell us that response to the Lord’s love and gifts is always possible. They teach us how to give without counting the cost.

We are also capable of great things, because we have the Lord Jesus as our brother and Lord and the Blessed Virgin Mary, in whose house we gather, as our mother. We have been bought at the high price of the Blood of the Lamb. Father Capodanno showed that he understood that when he was willing to shed his own blood in service to his Marines.

In this Gospel passage it never fails to strike me that Peter’s mother-in-law responds immediately to the gift of being healed. She understands that we are gifted for service. Does that not also describe our common vocation? Whatever we have received from the Lord we are to share with others. So often our society believes that what I have is mine and can only be sold for a profit. That works well in the business world, but it is not the ultimate model. Gifts and talents are received to be shared with others, to be used to build up the body of Christ, and to grow.

We have been confirmed with sacred Chrism, which is fragrant so that we are reminded of our mission to permeate the world with the scent of Christ. We are to go forward and share what has been so freely given to us.

As Pope Francis reminds us: “Each day offers us a new opportunity, a new possibility. We should not expect everything from those who govern us, for that would be childish. We have the space we need for co-responsibility in creating and putting into place new processes and changes. Let us take an active part in renewing and supporting our troubled societies. Today we have a great opportunity to express our innate sense of

¹ Cf. George T. Montague, *First Corinthians* in the *Catholic Commentary on Sacred Scripture*, pp. 72-3.

fraternity, to be Good Samaritans who bear the pain of other people's troubles rather than fomenting greater hatred and resentment."²

The Gospel passage again helps us to move forward and to see the virtue in the life of Father Capodanno that invites our imitation. In the darkness of night many come seeking cures. Jesus overcomes the darkness, traditional source of evil, the place of the devil's power. He does not hesitate to respond to people's needs despite the fatigue. "Jesus is the merciful presence of a Father who bends over the wounds of his lost children, who goes out to look for them, almost to discover the evil where it hides." Everyone who has experienced His presence then becomes a missionary disciple: bringing the sick to Him, caring for the poor, seeing that the Word is announced, making Him present in the sacraments, and filling the world with the joy of the Good News."³

All of us can relate to that scene. At the end of a full day, the phone rings and one more request is made. We have perhaps been pushed to our limits with responsibilities or the challenges of illness, and the tensions in our society. Then we look to a Father Capodanno and we see his ever ready spirit, his attention to his Marines. Many incentives draw us to this night. Fundamentally we come to the perfect prayer to learn from a great chaplain how to serve and how to give your all to another. St. Maximilian taught us that with his self-offering to save another and so does the Servant of God, Father Vincent Capodanno who offered his life for others.

² Pope Francis, *Fratelli Tutti*, 77.

³ Zevini and Cabra, *Lectio divina*, 11, pp. 224-5.