

**Archbishop Timothy P. Broglio, J.C.D.**  
**Combined Annual Memorial and Capodanno Mass**  
**6 September 2020**



Archbishop Philip Hannan tells of an adventure during the Second World War when he was in France and newly assigned to the 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne. He trudged across a snowy expanse carrying his Mass kit and wearing an Army trench coat. The enemy had taken a military warehouse in St. Vith and were wearing US uniforms. Many spoke English.

Then Chaplain Hannon was ordered to halt by someone speaking German. He responded in German to say that he spoke very little and if they spoke slowly he might understand. They told him to come forward. The two Americans, one of German descent, had been suspicious because no one in their unit had a trench coat and they did not think that they had a Catholic chaplain. However, hearing his German they were convinced that he could not be a German. Luckily, they checked, because the other alternative was simply to shoot him.

The two soldiers worked together to ascertain the identity of the stranger, both to avoid a needless casualty while still protecting the community.<sup>1</sup> This morning the word of God speaks to us about responsibility for the community of faith, the burden of leadership, and, as always, the invitation to growth.

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Philip Hannan, *The Archbishop wore Combat Boots*, pp.109-10.

The texts are excellent for this weekend when we gather as an archdiocese to remember those who have served and still serve our Country in the military, the leadership of Father Capodanno, and gather with a good portion of the co-sponsored seminarians.

As part of the Body of Christ through baptism and confirmation you and I have a responsibility to make the Gospel known and appreciated. We cannot speak about the authentic presentation of the Gospel without some mention of fraternal responsibility, which must necessarily include correction. Today's Gospel is part of an ecclesial discourse. It is for the community of believers. The Lord is concerned about the little ones, those who are simple and need guidance.

Today's page of the Gospel is the practical application of the parable of the lost sheep. Courage is needed to correct an erring brother or sister; conquer human respect, and look for authentic good of the other. Jesus offers a plan, an itinerary for fraternal correction. Avoid humiliating the one in error. Seek an avenue for reconciliation and renewal.

Christians seek what is good for others. So often in our national history men and women have given of themselves to overturn totalitarian regimes, to free oppressed people, to stop looting in the face of a natural disaster, to distribute aid after a hurricane or flooding and in so many other situations. Many have given their lives for these noble ends. Today we pause to honor their service, to pray for their eternal repose, and to beg for peace.

While we long for a time when all conflict is resolved at a conference table, even the Gospel presents the solution for one who refuses even to listen to the community of believers, which is called excommunication. It is medicinal, but then so is war—the object is to have the adversary sue for peace.

“At the root of personal and social divisions, which in differing degrees offend the value and dignity of the human person, there is a wound...we call it sin [both original] and that which each one of us commits when we abuse our own freedom.”<sup>2</sup> Our prayer this morning is also for forgiveness.

In this celebration I also include the many intentions which have been sent to me. We sense this communion with so many who are so far away. It is important to thank everyone who has committed himself or herself to the defense of the principles and values upon which our Nation was established. We are acutely aware of the importance of those principles and the sacrifices made to defend them.

We also pray for those who still serve in harm's way and those who bear the marks of war or old age served by the medical centers of the Department for Veterans Affairs. Can we forget the spouses or families whose loved ones never returned? We are a community of faith and we hold all our members in a close embrace of prayerful solidarity. In this stressful time of a pandemic, we also pray for those who continually respond to the needs of others—even at the risk of their own health.

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<sup>2</sup> St. John Paul II, *Reconciliatio et Paenitentia*, 2.

The accent this Sunday also falls on leadership. Silence is not an option. The passage from the prophet Ezekiel is a favorite of mine, because it reminds me what a pastor must do, but challenging at the same time, because people might not want to hear what you have to say.

We hear from second stage of Ezekiel's ministry: fall of Jerusalem and invasion of Nabucadonosor. The Prophet must sustain the hope of Israel in the fidelity of God to His promise. Yet he is a watchman over a place without walls or defenses: the dangers come from within.

New sequence added to usual pattern: sin, threat, punishment becomes sin, threat, conversion, and pardon. God wants life not death.

Father Capodanno immediately comes to mind. Here is a true leader. He finds his way to the front—despite the desires of the Command, because his mission is to be with his Marines. The danger is not rejection, but death. He cannot step back from his mission as watchman. He must bring what he alone can provide: sacraments, intercessory prayer, and the Person of Jesus Christ to those in danger of death. Remember the unique dimension that a Catholic priest in the military offers. It is not generic. It is specific and necessary for salvation. Father Capodanno continues to teach us that undeniable truth.

The Prophet brings forth the loving and paternal heart of God, who always finds a way to save His people and guide them on the path of conversion and life. So many lives were changed by contact with the Grunt Padre who met others where they were and led them to Christ.

That, my dear deacons and seminarians, remains essential to ministry. Find an avenue of approach or a language your hearer understands, do not be offended by his or her rough edges, be where those who need you are, and draw them to Him, Who alone offers everlasting life. Father Capodanno offers the perfect antidote to our "me world": it is about Jesus Christ, not me, and I have been called and chosen as an instrument or to stay in the biblical expression: the watchman!

We pray that he will soon be raised to the dignity of the altars so that his example might inspire others to assume the mantle of chaplain and draw all to Christ. I am delighted that on Friday, the Diocese of Lafayette in Louisiana initiated the Cause of Father Verbis Lafleur, a Chaplain in the Army Air Guard killed during the liberation of the Philippines as he pushed fellow prisoners to safety. Another example of a good watchman!

This Memorial Mass and celebration for the repose of Father Capodanno happily coincide--if anything related to the pandemic can be termed happy—with the annual gathering of the AMS co-sponsored seminarians, the flourishing sign of hope for the future of this global archbishopric. Seminary derives from seed which implies growth. Consequently, we pray for their growth in wisdom, commitment, and that fulfillment of the law described by St. Paul as love.

They are preparing to take up the role of binding and loosing: that powerful gift to forgive, admonish, and correct. Many wait to hear those words of healing from your lips:

"and I absolve you from your sins," the fundamental gift of renewal for the community of faith.

Some of you are also prior service and we hope that the same description will one day apply to all of you. Certainly those honored today set the bar high and we recognize that imitation is the highest form of flattery. As you return to the seminary, keep the example of Father Capodanno in your hearts. Build community based on the virtues of fraternal correction and authentic leadership. I would admonish you to study your languages better than Archbishop Hannon did, but then his poor German saved his life! Perhaps a better counsel is to imitate his service and devotion to others.