

**Archbishop Timothy P. Broglio, J.C.D.**

Annual Memorial Mass

May 16, 2021



Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

The Solemnity of the Ascension urges us to go forth, be and experience the signs of the power of God, and offer hope. Considering those themes, three chaplains whose Causes for canonization are being studied immediately came to mind. Fathers Lafleur and Kapaun were both offered the opportunity to fly to safety and both elected to stay with their men. Father Capodanno was not supposed to be in the line of fire and, yet, there he was with his Marines.

Active choices made to serve others. Countless men and women whom we honor today would fit into the same category and, consequently, we gather to pray for the repose of their souls, rejoice in their commitment, and also pray for those who still suffer the effects of their service to our Country.

Certainly, the key verb of the Ascension is go forth. We love to come to this magnificent shrine and contemplate the beauty of the Trinity Dome. It raises our eyes and our spirits, but only as an incentive to be welcomed into our true home and to bring others with us. The journey of life is ultimately about that moment of meeting the Lord Jesus face to face and hearing the words, “come, blessed of my Father, and enter the Kingdom prepared for you...”

Today we contemplate Jesus glorified and seated at the right hand of the Father, but we also recognize the mandate for dynamic action vividly communicated in the passage from the Acts of the Apostles. “More than looking to heaven, the question is establishing a link between heaven and earth.”<sup>1</sup>

Once they received the gift of the fullness of the Holy Spirit, the Apostles were tireless in announcing the Gospel message. They suffered persecution; they journeyed to distant lands; and they filled others with a powerful experience of the presence of Almighty

---

<sup>1</sup> Pronzato, *Il Vangelo in Casa*, ciclo B, p. 145.

God. That universal missionary mandate heard in this afternoon's Gospel is ours. It came with our baptism and confirmation.

Perhaps the experience of the first evangelization is distant from us, but the task of inserting the Gospel message into the everyday realities of our time could not be more pressing. We have met Christ and want to call others to participate in the fullness of life and belief.

Some years ago we saw the horrific images of the Coptic Christians beheaded on the seaside in Libya. Twenty men killed simply because they were authentic followers of Jesus Christ. The twenty-first, however, was from Chad and was not a Christian. The terrorists gave him the opportunity to save himself. However, he replied: "Their God is my God."<sup>2</sup> So impressed was he with the faith and the witness of the others, he joined them in their witness—baptized in blood.

The annals of the Church are filled with stories of those who desired to witness to Christ and to call others to participate in the fullness of life and belief. While we all deplore the violence, our thoughts also turn to those in the Holy Land who desperately desire to live in peace and practice their faith.

In a less dramatic, but still very authentic way I witnessed the results of a shared faith in the baptisms and professions of faith at the Naval Academy during the Easter Vigil and again on the first Sunday of May when six were baptized and more confirmed at the Air Force Academy. The challenge to preach the message beyond our comfort zones persists and contemporary society does not make that mission any easier. Of course, the Council of Trent reminded us that "though dwelling on earth, we should raise ourselves in desire to heaven, confessing that we are pilgrims and strangers on the earth, seeking a country, and that we are 'fellow citizens with the saints, and members of the household of God' (Eph. 2:19)."<sup>3</sup>

That notion of the life to come offers us hope in a time of pandemic. St. Paul is very clear in his message to the community at Ephesus heard as the second reading this afternoon. Our sights remain fixed on His call and the riches of His glory, held out to us as our inheritance. That pledge fills us with hope and allows us to move forward on our earthly pilgrimage. We recognize that this world will pass away and our homeland is in heaven. That is not an abdication of responsibility, but an authentic perspective.

As one of the theological virtues, Father Bochanski reminds us, that hope enables us "to put our trust in God and to be confident that He will always provide the help that we require in order to reach the goal that He has set for us"<sup>4</sup>, which is, of course, to dwell in His loving presence, a central element of the Solemnity of the Ascension.

Finally, in the Gospel Jesus promises His Apostles signs that the power of God is at work with them. "They will drive out demons...." The expression recalls the believer's opposition to evil and his or her resolve not to be complacent with it. The reference is to

---

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Sister Mary Margaret Tapang, *Breaking the Bread of the Word*, n. 6, p. 94.

<sup>3</sup> *The Catechism of the Council of Trent*.

<sup>4</sup> Philip Bochanski as quoted by Gerald Korson in *Legatus*, May, 2021, p. 17.

the witness we are called to offer and the coherence of our lives. That coherence requires constant personal vigilance, because the temptations are many.

“They will speak new languages.” Sometimes I wonder if that refers to the ability to understand and translate the acronyms of the different service branches, but actually it refers to the ability to transcend cultures and to recognize that the Gospel is for all people everywhere. You and I are called to speak to those cultures and adapt the forms of the message to the situations where it must be preached. As an archdiocese we are searching for ways to attract young people to this message which gives life. You only have to read the Acts of the Apostles or the Encyclical *Slavorum Apostoli* to know that the challenge has been constant in the history of the Church.

The Lord speaks of healing which is so evident today in the commitment of health care professionals, the desire of chaplains to minister even to those gravely ill. The presence of this archdiocese in the Department of Veterans Affairs is a testimony to fidelity to the Lord’s mandate. So also, is the investment of time and talents to care for the illnesses of the psyche.

You and I must also advocate for those still suffering the deadly effects of the pandemic beyond our borders. India readily comes to mind. Might we not advocate for the distribution of vaccines to those suffering masses much in the same way that this Nation contributed to rebuilding Europe after the WWII?

You know, in Africa the “black stone” is so well known as the antidote to poisonous snake bites. It can be a remedy for even the deadliest venom. We seem to be less protected in “civilized world” to the venom of gossip, gross generalizations, labels, and attacks on the internet. It is almost as if those poisons are more dangerous and harder to cure. We attempt to recycle in love those disagreeable realities. Love is indeed a miraculous black stone able to neutralize some wagging tongues.<sup>5</sup>

Do not tire looking for and being these signs of the loving power of God. I have been using the expression of Blessed Carlo Acutis in my confirmation homilies this year. “Everyone is born as an original, but many people end up dying as photocopies.” The Ascension reminds us that we have been filled with the power of the Risen Lord and sent forth to announce His Kingdom.

Therefore, it is good to give thanks for those who have put Country and other before self, to pray with those who mourn loved ones who perished on the battlefield, and to intercede for those who continue to struggle in their bodies and minds with the ravages provoked by war. Fathers Lafleur, Kapaun, and Capodanno are sterling examples of those who did not stand looking at the sky. They heard the call to action and responded as signs of the power of God who offered lasting hope.

---

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Pronzato, *op cit.*, p. 146.