

Archbishop Timothy P. Broglio, J.C.D.
Annual Sea Services Pilgrimage and Mass
2 October 2022



In February 2008 the Chief of Chaplains of the Navy offered me an orientation to at least two of the three Sea Services entrusted to the care of the Navy Chaplain Corps. We began with a visit to TBS at Quantico and continued to Norfolk where we boarded a helicopter to the USS Iwo Jima.

When the Chief of Chaplains and I took off the protective gear the ship's captain looked at my black suit and French cuffs, disappeared, and came back with a pair of his coveralls. He suggested that I wear them for the tour of the ship with Father Daigle, the ship's Catholic chaplain. We had a great tour and visited many of the crew all over the ship.

Surprising were the number of greetings of "captain" even though you could plainly see my roman collar where there would normally have been a tee shirt! Some people only looked at the eagle which presence was unfortunate, because even though the photographer snapped pictures throughout, I have none of them. Too late we realized that that rank on the coveralls might have been a path to an orange pair for impersonating an officer.

Needless to say, from that initial contact I have grown to appreciate the wonderful men and women, supported by their families, who serve our Nation in the Navy, Marine Corps, and Coast Guard. For this reason I willingly accepted the invitation of Cardinal O'Brien to "pinch hit" for him at this wonderful shrine dedicated to our first native-born saint.

On the ordinary weekly calendar 2 October is the Memorial of the Guardian Angels, clear signs of Divine Providence. It fits well with the vision to which the sacred authors we have just heard urge us to adhere. Faith is in a Person who teaches us to depend on Almighty God and put everything in the perspective of eternal life.

The prophet Habakkuk examines the problem of evil for us. It is so contemporary as we watch the decay of our society, we witness a senseless war in Europe, about which the Bishop of Rome dedicated all of his Angelus address today, we see the desolation of people in Florida and Puerto Rico after a violent storm leaves a path of destruction, and we have to struggle to defend religious freedom in the "land of the free and the home of the brave".

Two words might describe the response: wait and trust. We walk on a pilgrimage and we are part of a story, not a mathematical formula. Time is an important factor. “St. Thomas, quoting St. Augustine, wrote that ‘God would not allow any evil into any of His works unless His wisdom and power were such that He could bring an even greater good out of the evil.’”¹ Even respecting our free will, He allowed men to crucify the God man, but the result was the immense good for humanity: Salvation!

It falls to us to wait for the fulfillment of the divine plan. To do that we must constantly remember that the fullness awaits us at the end of time. The military drills constantly to be prepared, to be ready. The Coast Guard even has it as a motto “Semper Paratus”. We, the Body of Christ are also preparing and walking toward the fullness of life. We want to be prepared to meet the Lord of the universe.

The readings toward the end of the liturgical year call us to consider the last times and the second coming. St. Elizabeth Ann Seton also teaches us that broader vision and that trust. Disinherited by her family for embracing the Catholic faith, she moved forward, raised her own family, and founded a religious order that still manifests the virtue of charity today. One of her messages fits well with the passages heard today: “If it succeeds, I bless God...If it does not succeed, I will bless God, because then it will be right that it should not succeed.”

St. Paul charges St. Timothy to stir into flame the gift of God which is the ordination he received. Divine gifts are never given to be put under the bed. They are given to be used. I always tell those I confirm to draw on the gifts received and fill the world with the fragrance of the Gospel. We might recall here St. John Paul II’s vibrant challenge to the French Catholics on his first visit as Bishop of Rome there. “France, Fille aînée de l’Eglise, es-tu fidèle aux promesses de ton baptême? » ²

We can ask ourselves the same question to spur our thoughts and actions in favor of the dissemination of the faith. The military images in this passage are powerful: strength, be not ashamed, courage in hardship, guard the deposit of faith. The military must be both offensive and defensive—just like a good football team. You have to protect what you have, but also at times go forth perhaps to liberate those who are oppressed. To that concept the motto of the U.S. Merchant Marine Academy might be added: “Acta non Verba.”

The Archdiocese for the Military Services must imitate those she serves. We are forever on the offensive to seek more priests for the chaplaincy and to find new ways to bring the Gospel to the young people entrusted to her. At the same time we must defend the space that is provided. The closure of Catholic programs on naval installations is a great concern, because it means that, despite the presence of the chaplaincy, there will be no Catholic voice, advocacy, or presence. So often the “numbers game” that has been used

¹ Peter Kreeft, *Food for the Soul*, p. 591.

² St. John Paul II, homily at Le Bourget, 1.VI.80.

only counts noses in a chapel and does not look at baptisms, marriage preparation, confessions, or merely the sailor looking for counsel from a Catholic priest.

It might seem discriminatory that there is no Catholic presence when other faith groups are represented. After all Catholics are the single largest faith group in the Sea Services.

I learned early on that the “semper fidelis” of the Marine Corps applies in the case of the AMS to identifying to whom she must be faithful. It is to those who have been entrusted to my pastoral care. We can surely do better than merely shut things down.

Jesus in the Gospel urges us to have faith, to accomplish what He has given us to do, and to recognize His power. The “Thoughts on death” by St. Paul VI deeply impressed me, because I admire him greatly. He was the first Pope I saw in person, the one who welcomed me to Rome as a seminarian and was still there when I left the first time as a priest. He believed that at the end of his life, he would quote the Gospel passage: “We are unprofitable servants; we have done what we were obliged to do”. If that was his reflection at the end of a life of total and selfless service, what can I say?

It is important to keep things in perspective and to recognize that our Kingdom is not of this world. Our homeland is in heaven. Perhaps that might be an application of what is sometimes called the Navy motto “non sibi sed patriae”—not to himself, but to his homeland. If we evaluated the great questions of our lives in terms of eternity, would our attitudes and responses not be different?

Can we apply the last stanza of the Navy hymn to our commitment of faith? “Blue of the Mighty Deep; Gold of God's Sun, Let these colors be till all of time be done, done, done, On seven seas we learn Navy's stern call: Faith, Courage, Service true, with Honor, Over Honor, Over All.

Fourteen years ago I was offered a crash course on ministry to the Sea Services. Of course, it should be second-hand to a successor of the Apostles. After all, most of them were fishermen.