

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

Veterans' Day, 2011

(Mi. 4:1-4; Rom. 7:14-20; Jn. 15:9-17)



The following homily preached by Archbishop Broglio at the first annual "Red, White, and Blue Mass in the Diocese of Phoenix also captures elements from his homily at a Veterans' Day commemoration at St. Mary of the Assumption Church in Upper Marlboro, MD on Sunday, 6 November 2011:

Gratitude fills my heart on this Memorial of St. Martin of Tours, a soldier who became a monk and was later chosen as bishop. I thank Bishop Olmsted for his kind invitation and Bishop Nevares for allowing me to preach. I guess that Deacon John Scott is a bit like St. Martin from Major General to servant, which is the definition of deacon. I am grateful for his care today, as well.

This morning far from here on the plains of Kansas another Mass was offered to remember the Servant of God, Father Emil Kapuan, an Army Chaplain. He was dubbed the Good Thief, because he used all of his talents and cunning to get extra food from his Communist captors in North Korea. While he himself died a prisoner of war, many of those he served survived, because of his efforts and spirit of self sacrifice.

We gather for this first Red, White, and Blue Mass in the Phoenix Diocese and every Veterans' Day to remember those who have served or continue to serve our Nation. It is good for us to pause and beg our loving Father for the gift of peace along with the realization of our potential as Christians. The sacrifice of others also invites us to consider what authentic patriotism means.

With the Prophet Micah we pray: "They shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; One nation shall not raise the sword against another, nor shall they train for war again."¹ In the midst of the horrors of war fought far away from us and considering the price our young men and women pay and the sacrifice of their families, we cannot fail to beg for peace. As I visit military installations from the rising to the setting of the sun, I sense the anxiety of those who have accepted the responsibility to defend our Nation. They are weary of war. They know its cost and have seen the suffering. Their hearts seek peace.

Yet they defend democracy, certain values, and the fundamental principles upon which our Country was founded. Pope Benedict reminded us during his visit here that

¹ Micah 4:3b.

“Freedom is not only a gift, but also a summons to personal responsibility. Americans know this from experience – almost every town in this country has its monuments honoring those who sacrificed their lives in defense of freedom, both at home and abroad.”² Father John Courtney Murray, a Jesuit, liked to remind everyone at the time of Vatican II that the US is the only country in the world founded on self-evident principles.

If you read the Declaration of Independence, you will discover at the beginning: “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.” It means that the US was not established, because of a common ethnic or racial origin, or a common language, or those other elements that characterize many other nations of the world. It is based on certain self-evident truths: life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.

We are grateful for the wisdom of our founders, but we cannot forget that such noble principles required the sacrifice of many men, women, and families in order to maintain this way of life. For 235 years some have sacrificed valiantly to allow us the freedom of religion—to name one of those rights defined by the first ten amendments to the Constitution. We do not forget that our freedom is not limited to worship, what we do at Mass or in the church, but includes all aspects of our religion: to preach the Gospel, to teach in Catholic schools, to promote the moral principles of Jesus Christ, to encourage a certain way of life, and so much more.

It is important to remember the extent of our liberty, because there are many attempts to limit it, to keep religion corralled in the sacristy, to borrow the image used by Blessed Pope John Paul II in Paraguay during the dictatorship of President Stroessner. We honor the Veterans by holding high the lamps of vigilance so that their service was not in vain. Patriotism is a love of country, which sustains the best values and principles of that nation, but also honestly attempts to purify whatever dulls the brilliance or the glory of that history.

There is certainly the responsibility to do that polishing and purifying on a personal level, but also to hold those who represent us to respect moral principles and allow us to make use of the freedom of religion that is ours. “From the dawn of the Republic, America’s quest for freedom has been guided by the conviction that the principles governing political and social life are intimately linked to a moral order based on the dominion of God the Creator.”³

Two Sundays ago I celebrated the Eucharist for the small Catholic community at Camp Darby in Livorno. It was my duty to confirm them in their faith and encourage their efforts in growing in that faith. However, it is also the duty of the Department of Defense to

² Benedict XVI, Discourse at the White House, 16.IV.08.

³ *Ibid.*

make sure that they do not sacrifice their freedom of religion while they serve this country overseas!

Father Kapuan exercised his personal freedom in sacrificing himself to offer food and consolation to those in need in an extraordinary situation. However, it is the obligation of those in charge to make certain that there are always Father Kapuans and other chaplains to make that freedom of religion not an empty phrase, but an authentic right!

The Gospel indeed places us at the apex of the Revelation in New Testament about God who is love. We listen to the words of Jesus at Last Supper: "As the Father loves me, so I also love you. Remain in my love." They enlighten us and fill us with profound joy, because love comes from the Father through Jesus and reaches us. The true source of love is God. As the Holy Father reminds us: "*We have come to believe in God's love*: in these words the Christian can express the fundamental decision of his life. Being Christian is not the result of an ethical choice or a lofty idea, but the encounter with an event, a person, which gives life a new horizon and a decisive direction."⁴

As we know, the challenge for us is to remain in love which Jesus transmits to us. Paul talked to the Romans about the pitfalls in the second reading. It is not a superficial affective love, but an effective one. It must manifest itself in concrete actions and decisions. Otherwise it is merely an illusion. "For I do not do the good I want, but I do the evil I do not want. Now if (I) do what I do not want, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me."⁵

Jesus asks us to keep His commandments, because the liberation from slavery of sin brings human person to his original innocence and opens him to communion with God. We are challenged to grow in that communion and to deepen our understanding of what it means. Life in God and in accord with the fullness of His revelation, Jesus Christ, is not simple. It requires our active acceptance of divine grace.

The great gesture of love in the life of Christ is His willingness to give up His life for His friends, regardless of their worthiness, appreciation, or even response. Jesus calls us His friends. That is extraordinary. We are not worthy of the designation, but He so desires.

Our appreciation can only be expressed by loving as Jesus loved us. To do so, we must welcome His heart in ours. The Eucharist has the purpose of putting His heart in us. This moment of mysterious communion allows us to partake of the relationship of love which is the Trinity. Then we can reflect His generous sentiments in all that we do, provided that we are truly open to His gifts.

Hence, we justly give thanks today for the service given by the men and women in uniform and their families. Inspired by Father Kapuan and others, we renew our commitment to be good citizens, to pray for lasting peace, and we beg for the eternal repose of those who have died defending our Country.

⁴ Benedict XVI, *Deus caritas est*, 1.

⁵ Rom. 7:19-20.