



He will return with his immense heart, with his heart of fire, his poor man's soul and his smile. He will return ! And the Immaculate Heart of Mary will triumph !

THE BETTER PART PRIEST, VICTIM WITH CHRIST



« O Christ, my poor God, there you are all alone, abandoned in Your country Church with its steeple threatening to fall, all alone in Your poorly swept house into which no one enters, and on Sunday You hear outside the sound of the Sunday work that mocks You...

« Thus I come to be homeless with You! I come to be hated as You are, to be like You, the leper who is cast out of the human group, this peculiar isolated Man, this Man wearing a robe from whom the other people of the village keep away and sneeringly look at when He passes by.

« I come to be in need of work and not find it, and to be treated as a loafer by the drunkards and even, more or less, by the sensible people.

« Here I am... I am coming, I will be taken for an ignoramus, a madman ... Calumny will spy on me from behind the door – “a man like the others... he does his trickery under the table” – they will lie to do me harm.

« Yet I am coming, my poor Master. I am coming to You because everyone has abandoned You... I am coming... Both of us, You in Your church in distress, me next door in my empty house – You little known and I scorned – we will both be companions of misfortune. » (Marie Noël, *NOTES INTIMES*)

FUNERAL ORATION

BY FATHER RAYMOND ZAMBELLI

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(Sermon of the *Requiem* Mass of Thursday, 18 February 2010)

My dear friends,

When the news of Father's death reached me and Brother Bruno proposed to me that I celebrate the funeral Mass in this chapel of the Community, there came to my mind this admirable page of Bossuet that I would like to read you because it immediately and brilliantly introduces us into the mystery of Christian death:

« Nothing in the world is greater than Jesus Christ.

« Nothing is greater in Jesus Christ than His Sacrifice.

« Nothing is greater in His Sacrifice than His last breath and the precious moment that separated His Soul from His Body.

« Then all the children of the promises took their places with the Saviour and, becoming victims with Him, their death, that until then could only have been a punishment for sin, was changed into that of Jesus Christ in His Sacrifice.

« The death of Christians, who are consecrated in their Baptism to be victims, became in that of Jesus Christ a perfect Sacrifice; and from His oblation together with theirs, there became but one oblation.

« Thus it is there that all the agonies of the world end. Jesus Christ is the Sovereign Priest of our deaths, and until the end of time He perpetuates His agony and His Sacrifice in the death of the faithful! »

My dear friends, what a fortunate century in which the truths of the Catholic Faith were expressed in such a manner!

It would be inappropriate for me to relate here the life of this exceptional man who was the Abbé Georges de Nantes and to deliver his panegyric. Others who knew him better than I will want to do so as a legitimate duty of remembrance and of gratitude.

The liturgy of the dead invites us to reserve and sobriety so as not to lose sight of what is essential. This essential is contained in this confident petition and this sweet supplication that we address to God, who is so rich in mercy, in the prayer of this Mass:

« Lord, to whom alone it belongs to judge and to pardon, we pray to You for the soul of our brother Georges. » All is said in so few words: *« Lord, to whom alone it belongs to judge and to pardon. »*

When I was the rector of the Sanctuary of Lisieux, I had the opportunity of welcoming many times the members of the CCR who had come on pilgrimage to a saint whom the Abbé de Nantes had made them know and love: the Little Thérèse. On one of these occasions he was anxious to meet me and to open his priestly heart to me. He was grateful to me for having granted him at Lisieux what he considered a sort of privilege and a signal grace. There followed a correspondence between him and me that I treasure.

Providence then led me to Lourdes to be the rector of the Sanctuaries, and I again had the occasion of seeing and welcoming each year these same pilgrims, ever more numerous, especially in 2008 for their memorable pilgrimage on the occasion of the 150th anniversary of the apparitions of the Immaculate.

Thus it was that deep bonds of esteem and great cordiality were forged over the years until I was given the joy of being invited and welcomed into this Maison Saint-Joseph at Saint-Parres.

During our exchanges with one another, imagine their surprise and my own at a discovery we made one day: we realised that the priest who had influenced Abbé Georges de Nantes the most and from whom he said that he had learned everything and to whom he owed everything, was the same priest with whom I was to become acquainted twenty years later in similar circumstances. Georges de Nantes had known him during his years at the Seminary of Issy-les-Moulineaux, and I during my years at the seminary in Bayeux. Louis Vimal was thus this priest of the Company of Saint Sulpice to whom we were indebted for having introduced us to theology, to the Fathers of the Church, to the splendour of the liturgy, to the world of the arts and poetry; it suffices for me to evoke the little lady from Auxerre, Marie Noël. It was he who was able to make us share his passion for the great Century of Souls (the 17th century), to teach us to appreciate Bossuet and above all, Blaise Pascal, a native of Auvergne as he was. Thus, in a way, in the person of this exceptionally gifted and atypical Sulpician, we had the same foster father. That necessarily creates deep and lasting bonds...

To come back to my most recent encounters with the Abbé de Nantes in the evening of his life, I retain the touching memory of my first visit to his cell, which took the place of an infirmary for him..

Confined to his bed, unable to speak, reduced to immobility, he could no longer communicate except by his look, but what a look! I can see him surrounded by his brothers who took turns at his bedside like so many guardian angels. A climate of peace, serenity, tenderness, attentive charity and prayer reigned in this cell. It was his real oxygen, so true is it that one cannot live or survive without love. That is the secret of this improbable longevity that allowed him to remain among you until this dawn of 15 February when the Blessed Virgin came to seek him, as Brother Bruno so rightly wrote in the announcement that he made of his death.

Day and night he was able to contemplate the statue of Our Lady of Fatima, for whom he had such great devotion. There is no doubt that She must have murmured in his ear what she confided to Lucy on 13 June 1917:

« Do not be discouraged; I will never abandon you! My Immaculate Heart will be your refuge and the way that will lead you to God. »

Even though he regularly descended to the chapel, his cell was his oratory. His bed served as the paten on which, in silence and mystery, he could offer himself to the Merciful Love of the Good God and renew this offering to Him with each beat of his heart as Little Thérèse taught us to do. Henceforth he presents himself to us in the features of the Holy Childhood and of the Holy Face. He became as poor, trusting and abandoned as a child. He fulfilled the condition that Jesus set for entering into the Kingdom: *to become a child again*.

In his configuration to the suffering and crucified Christ whose *kenosis* he shared, he was living St. Paul's recommendations to his disciple Timothy:

*« If we die with Him we shall also live with Him.
« If we suffer with Him we shall also reign with Him. »* (2 Tm 2:11-12)

It is undoubtedly in this manner that he obtained for himself, for his "dear ones", and for the Church so many precious graces.

How many surprises we will have in the beyond!

It is precisely, – and beyond appearances –, this other world of which the Immaculate spoke to Bernadette in the grotto of the rock of Massabielle on 18 February 1858, when She told her:

« I do not promise to make you happy in this world, but in the next. »

On the anniversary of this promise of the Virgin Mary, let us pray to little Bernadette, whose feast day it is, to strengthen us in the Hope of this other world.

I must conclude, or more precisely I would like for it to be Father himself who addresses us in order to give us a final message. It suffices for us to open "*MÉMOIRES ET RÉCITS*" to the chapter entitled: "*HOLY SOULS, HOLY HOUSES*":

« There are not two races of men: the saints, the elect, who have fled the battle and no longer experience our wretchedness, and we, the people of the world, assailed by temptation and sinners of necessity. Neither are there pharisees on the one side hiding their falls, and publicans, such as we are, confessing and beginning again. There is the fraternal body of the Church Militant, all the members of which must experience trial – of course, not all to the same degree – within the limits of their strength and of grace. Some, however, pray much, while others pray little. Each one at every hour receives from, the Heavenly Father, from Jesus crucified and from His holy Mother, the help he asks for in order to remain faithful and to become holy if he wants it. I had parents and teachers who lived like that, and if I did not follow them, or only followed their example from afar in my unserious youth, may God forgive me. »

Let us listen to him in the famous page of "*THE FUNERAL AT CHÔ-NAS*": *« ... What I thought even then on the way home from church and what I still think is that, for dealing with this great drama, unique and yet universal, of the death of a peasant, or of his wife, or of his child, there has never been invented nor ever will be invented such an ensemble of rites and chants. There could be nothing so majestic, so simple, so poor in means but rich in meaning, so terribly pathetic and full of mystical joy, as that liturgy of that time, which came to us from depths of the ages.*

« Dare I tell you that, even from that distant period, the thought of my own funeral was a joy to me to be savoured in every exquisite detail, the tender gestures, the sweet chants that the Church would perform over my body like a mother, or like a spouse for her beloved? How sweet to die, I thought, in the arms of the Church!

« The mystery of snatching one dead from the power of darkness that held him captive, and of his being redeemed through the immaculate Host of the Mass, were they not already in my childish eyes the very spectacle of his exaltation and entry into the eternal bliss of the Father? » AMEN.



ADDRESS OF BROTHER BRUNO OF JESUS AT THE CEMETERY

« *Blessed are they who suffer persecution for justice's sake.* » (Mt 5:10) The entire life of our Father was a cross and a martyrdom, like that of Our Lord and for the same reason: the thought of *Hell, where the souls of poor sinners go*. Like Our Lord condemned to death by the Jewish authorities, he opposed with all his might, publicly, surrounded by a handful of brothers and sisters, and by a small “*Phalange*” of disciples and friends, the forces of Hell that had been unleashed even in the Church. He was exposed to hatred and scorn from the hierarchy of the Church, and to the embarrassed or lethal silence of colleagues and confreres, with some courageous and very comforting exceptions. Thank you, dear Father!

His case is unprecedented because in the Church's two thousand years there have never been proceedings instituted against a Pope or a Council like those that he instituted by explicit acts of accusation, – acts which remained suspended, without response, and without judgement! While awaiting the infallible judgement of the sovereign Judge, this silence, not to say this dereliction of duty, establishes the Abbé de Nantes, our Father and founder of the Little Brothers and Little Sisters of the Sacred Heart, not only as a legitimate member of the faithful and true priest of Jesus Christ, but also a confessor and doctor of the Roman Catholic Faith in our times of apostasy.

He is not dead. He has entered into life, as a small child, in the likeness of Blessed Louis Martin whose “dementia” made little Thérèse say in 1889: « *Papa is the Good God's little child.* » For the benefit of those who shared his humiliation, she added: « *To spare him great sufferings, the Good God wants us to suffer on his behalf!* »

In 1894, to her sister Léonie, she wrote: « *Papa's death did not give me the impression of a death, but of a veritable life. I find him again after six years of absence (!), I sense him around me, watching over me and protecting me.* »

Dear brothers and sisters, friends from the *Phalange*, are we not even more united now that we look to Heaven to discover there a Father, not forgetting Mother Marie-Noël, and Brother Hugues and his parents and grandparents, in short, the whole *Phalange of the Immaculate* that we will soon re-form there around him, our beloved Father, as we form it already here below in the Immaculate Heart of Mary, for life is so short! Then we will be united, no longer to be separated, and we will be happy to have fought as good and faithful servants so that when the Son of Man returns He may still find faith on the earth... *Amen!*