

MASS FOR DEPARTED CONFRERES
Provincial of ZMB
28th February 2014

Introduction:

Dear Confreres, good morning, and welcome to this Eucharistic Celebration for our departed confreres. Article 54 of Our Constitutions says: “The memory of departed confreres unites in a love that will not pass away, those who are still pilgrims, with those who are already resting in Christ”. Article 76 of our Regulations invites the Provincial to see that a Eucharist is celebrated for our departed confreres during every retreat. Today we remember all our confreres who have gone to the Lord especially those who have completed their life here on earth during these past 6 years. May the Lord comfort them all with the joy of His Presence for ever. And may they intercede with the Lord so that we may all remain happy and holy sons of Don Bosco till the end of our lives.

Homily:

Dear Confreres: On this day, as we remember our departed Confreres who have gone before us, we wonder why they were called to go to the Lord and not us. We have seen Salesians young and old, called to end their life here on earth... and we wonder when our day will be? How will it be? Will I have a peaceful or violent death? Or will I have to undergo a slow and painful death or will death visit me in an instant? We do not know, and we need not know.

In the first reading, St John is inviting us to reflect on our life here in this world. We all are well aware that our life on earth is only for a short while. But during the short period of time that it lasts, we can live a type of life worthy of God – a type of life that brings happiness and joy. What is this type of life? It is to follow the example of Jesus who laid down His life for us because of His great love for us. St John is inviting us to make of our lives, a life of love for each other. “If God loved us so much as to send His Son to be the expiation for our sins, then we too should love one another.... “ i.e. lay down our lives for each other.

The message of Pope Francis for the World Day of the Sick, on 11 February 2014, was: **“Faith and Charity: We ought to lay down our lives for one another”**(1 Jn 3:16). Are we ready to do this... to lay down our lives for the youngsters, for the parishioners, for the confreres with whom we live? How many of us would be ready to do that?

St John tells us that God loved us first. This is the love that we are called to imitate. To make of my life, a life of love, for the young and for everyone. This is what Jesus did. Today’s Gospel speaks of His dying on the cross for us. Though He was the Son of God, Jesus did not exempt Himself from death. But He underwent death in its most dreadful and agonizing reality - abandoned by His close followers to whom He tried to convey His message of love and of humility - mocked and ridiculed by the leaders, the soldiers and the hostile Jewish crowd. Jesus did not mind at all, the terrible physical pain as well as the unbearable psychological pain inflicted on Him. In the midst of this darkness, He surrenders Himself to HIS Father in utter confidence: “Father into your hands I commit my spirit”

We normally tend to avoid pain and suffering. We get discouraged when we have to live situations that are difficult. We complain. Jesus invites us all, to follow His example of loving surrender into the hands of the Father. Though He had to undergo excruciating pain and darkness, and he had to cry out: "My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?", yet, He is sure that the Father is with Him. Hence He was able to hand over His life to the Father in a loving, confident surrender.

Dear Confreres, one day, you and I will have to follow the path our departed confreres. We will have to follow the example of Jesus. One day, we too will have to surrender our lives to the Father. How happy that day would be, if we have been people who have transformed our lives into one of love for others and who are able to say often "Father into your hands I commend my spirit"?. We will not be here on this earth for ever. So, why not transform our short span of life into a life filled with love for God and for our neighbour? Our Father Don Bosco spent his entire life for the salvation of the young... so that even during his dying moments his only thought was the welfare of the young. We read that as he was dying, he even tried to sit up, clap his hands and say: "Hurry, rush to save those young people. Mary Most Holy Help them. Mother, Mother"- Here we have the wonderful example of a life lived in love for the other!!

When in our lives, our own ambition, plans and projects have priority, we are still not ready for heaven. But when God and His Will takes the priority in our lives, then we will be ready to go to the Father. St Paul could say: "I live not I, but Christ lives in me"(Gal 2:20). "For me to live is Christ and to die is gain" (Phil.1:21). Because, in everything he did, he tried to seek the Will of the Father. There was nothing of Paul, everything was of the Lord. Hence he could rightly say: "My desire is to depart and be with Christ!!"(Phil 1:23)

We are familiar with the message of Blessed Mother Theresa of Calcutta: " We may not all be called to do great things; but we can do the small things, **with great love!**" Let carry out the big or small responsibilities that obedience has placed on us with great love and not as a burden. We know that at the end of our lives, we will be judged on love!! People will remember us if we have been persons who loved others.

Then we can confidently and happily hand over into the hands of our loving Father, our entire life, the very moment He has planned in His goodness for each one of us. Let us ask the Lord through the intercession of our beloved departed Confreres that we too may remain faithful till the end, and be able to do everything we are able, with great love. May our father Don Bosco intercede with the Lord for this grace for each one of us.

At the Night Prayers or Compline, we always say this prayer: "Into your hands O Lord I commend my Spirit". Let us say it with a great deal of love and confidence and let us surrender each day we have lived into the hands of the loving Father, who will take care of us without fail. May the Lord bless us all.

Fr George Chalissery SDB