

FAREWELL

Homily given by Fr. Dennis Koliński, SJC

St. Peter's Church in Volo

8 August 2010

The difficult moment has finally come. It's time to say farewell to you. When I came here as your pastor almost three years ago, I knew, as you did, that one day I would have to leave. But none of us, least of all me, thought that it would come this soon. In this short time, you have all become very dear to me and leaving St. Peter's is like leaving home. But both you and I know that this is God's will and must be done. What matters is not what we feel but that we follow His Providential plan. Some of you have already expressed your sadness and there are probably a few, who will be glad that I'm leaving. On my part, even though I try not show it, this is one of the most difficult things that I have had to do in my life. It's like leaving a very close-knit family, and you have truly been that for me over the last three years.

In the end, however, God has a purpose in everything. Among other things, He is giving all of us a chance to grow spiritually. Just as our muscles grow only when we push them so hard that they hurt, so in the same way our soul grows in perfection through suffering, sacrifice, trial and tribulation.

In taking me away from St. Peter's God is, first of all, asking me to grow in greater humility by removing me from the temptation to think that all the things that I have done here at St. Peter's over these three years is only my accomplishment, when in fact it was actually His work and I was only His instrument. He's asking me to grow in more perfect obedience, which has greater merit when we are asked to do something that we don't want to do, yet willingly accept as God's will. And He's asking me to grow in detachment, not because being attached to all of you is bad, but because undo attachment to things of this world, even to people, can sometime hinder our growth in a more pure love of God; but even more, because as a religious I must be ready and willing to sacrifice anything of this world for the sake of the kingdom.

But God isn't only asking me to grow spiritually through this experience. He's also asking each one of you to grow in humility, so that although you have so many good things here at St. Peter's, you won't begin to think that you are better than others. You certainly aren't being asked to respond to this situation under obedience as I had to but God is asking you to grow in a greater acceptance of His will in your lives, whatever it may be. And He's also asking you to grow in detachment because we know that all things of this world are passing. Only in heaven will they be permanent. This virtue of detachment is especially important because Fr. Garcia must now become your pastor. That's why I'm actually glad for his sake, that when I leave, I will be far away from here—not because I want to be, but because it isn't fair that the new pastor constantly try to function in the shadow of someone else.

So, beginning Friday, I will no longer be your shepherd but before I go I'd like to give you some final guidance. First of all, I implore you to put intrigues, gossip, detraction, calumnies and personal agendas out of your midst. Such things are only of the devil, are sinful and breed division. They have no place in the lives of those, who claim to be followers of Christ, who gave us the command: "Love me as I have loved you." Any

Christian, who feels that he can reconcile these things with being a Christian, should read St. Paul's letters to the Corinthians.

We have something far more important before us than promoting ourselves and our own personal agendas. Instead, we need to fervently follow Christ's command: "that they may all be one, as you, Father, are in me and I in you, that they also may be in us."¹ We are in the midst of the greatest war since the creation of the world: a terrifying cosmic battle between the forces of Michael the Archangel and the minions of the Satan, who is doing everything in his power to destroy the Church and drag untold numbers of souls down into the fires of eternal damnation. This battle for **your** souls is raging around us on every side day and night. Millions upon millions of good angels are battling against evil ones, yet there are Christians fighting and backbiting among themselves, trying to prove who is more important.

You say that you'd like me to stay here to continue to lead you and teach you. God, however, has said that it is time to move on. For almost three years, I have been instructing and training you. God is telling you that now is the time to pick up your swords and take up the battle yourselves. You have grown very much. You have already learned to walk by yourselves. Now it is time to arm yourselves with the armor of light and set out to do spiritual battle. Continue to read and learn more about your faith so that you can defend it. Grow closer to Christ through the sacraments. Above all, stay in a state of grace. And know that although it may look dark, we already know who will win and we are on His team. With all the forces of heaven on your side, why fear. Remember that Christ told us, "do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul; rather, be afraid of the one who can destroy both soul and body in Gehenna."²

And two of the most powerful weapons, with which I have armed you, are truth and beauty: truth, because all the lies in the world cannot endure in its midst, and beauty, because it moves us to wonder and awe of our almighty and wondrous Lord, who Himself is all beauty. "The theologian Father Hans Urs von Balthasar once wrote that 'In the experience of extraordinary beauty, we are able to grasp a phenomenon that otherwise remains veiled.'³ In other words, what we actually encounter in beauty is truth because in God beauty and truth are one and the same. That's why in today's great battle it is especially important that the two work together to defeat the enemy. Some say, that all of this music and ceremony and vestment stuff is all unnecessary fluff. But Dostoevsky wrote that "beauty will save the world." Truth slays the enemy but beauty first disarms him. With truth we stand firmly on the foundations on which the very universe was founded. With beauty "we encounter ... an experience ... as overwhelming as a miracle, something we will never get over."⁴

In my first homily to you as pastor three years ago, I told you that you are all here at this parish as a part of God's Providential plan. He wanted you here for a special reason and you responded to His call by your choice of this parish under the patronage of St. Peter, the First Pope. In this age when Peter is so often treated with contempt, your very association with this place makes you powerful witnesses of unwavering faithfulness to the man, who represents Peter for us today, to the man, whom God has called to lead His Church in our time. Remember the vision of Don Bosco. It is the man in white, who will steer the ship of the Church through the turbulent waters, with the Eucharist on one side and the Blessed Mother on the other, and defeat the enemy.

I shepherded you here for almost three years as one of Peter's local commanders in the Church Militant. As I prepare to leave you, I ask all of my young parishioners to search deep within your souls to find out if God is asking you to be leaders of His troops as priests or one of His special forces as religious. Not long ago in a homily on masculinity I said that "Men are called to action, to leadership and to self-sacrificial love. ... A man must consider his life dispensable for the sake of those he leads and protects." That's how I viewed my fathering of you. And now, it's as if in imitation of the patron under whom I served, that the Lord is saying to me, as He once said to Peter: "Amen, amen, I say to you, when you were younger, you used to dress yourself and go where you wanted; but when you grow old, you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will dress you and lead you where you do not want to go."⁵ During this time, I have been your father. But even though I am now being led somewhere that I didn't choose, you will always still be my children.

I'm sending you out now to fight the battle ahead of us. Pick up the double-edged sword of truth and beauty and wield it proudly and firmly. You think that you aren't ready but you are. Fight valiantly, for you are the hope of the Church and I'm very proud of you! You will always be in my prayers.

¹ John 17:21.

² Matthew 10:28.

³ Cameron, Peter John O.P. "Editorial," *Magnificat*, August 2010. Volume 12, Number 6.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ John 21:18.