

Fr. Gerard, a dedicated and generous life

Mikolow, PL - John 6, 35 - 40

Homily by Fr. Milton Zonta, SDS



Dear Brothers and Sisters. I cordially greet His Excellency the Bishop Adrian Galbas SAC I extend my fraternal greetings to all the priests present here. My warmest greetings to the Salvatorian confreres and to the members of the Salvatorian Family, in particular to Fr. Josef Figiel, provincial superior of this Unit, as well as to the confreres who have come from Switzerland. In addition, I extend my warmest greetings to the relatives and close friends of Fr. Gerard Rogowski. Your presence here is a source of comfort, gratitude and peace. I thank you deeply for your presence on this day when we sing together a prayer of thanksgiving for the dedicated and generous life of Fr. Gerard Rogowski, our confrere and former Superior General of our Apostolic Society.

Dear brothers and sisters, when a friend, a relative, leaves us, something dies in our soul, but when someone like our confrere Fr. Gerard leaves us, something is rekindled within us, which tells us that not death, but Life always has the last word. Fr. Gerard was an endearing person, a Salvatorian who loved people and who made himself loved by all of us who had the good fortune to know him and/or live with him.

It is very beautiful on this day when we say goodbye to Fr. Gerard to hear the





words of the Gospel with a Salvatorian flavour: "This is the will of my Father, that everyone who sees the Son (Jesus Christ) may have eternal life..." (John 6,40). Perhaps how many times Fr. Gerard has meditated and preached on these words that in God there is a unique and unquestionable desire: that no person "should perish" (Jn 6,39). That no one should live in despair and loneliness. That no person be deprived of Eternal Life. It is that life which does not die. It is the life that goes beyond the grave. Eternal Life is a term that dwelt in the heart of Blessed Francis Jordan. For our Founder, Eternal Life is life lived in God's way, that is, as a service to others, because serving others does not diminish us, but makes us grow and have the life of God in us.

In December last year Pope Francis said: *"Life is the time of decisive, eternal choices. Banal choices lead to a banal life, great choices make life great"*¹. Indeed, this has been Fr Gerard's testimony of not having chosen a banal life, but of having become an instrument of grace and a visible sign of the love of the living, true and merciful God (cf. John 17:3).

In these sad times in which we live, when hundreds of young men are dying on the battlefields, we can only thank God the Father for the long life of Father Gerard in this world. Let us thank him for more than 91 years of life and 71 years of Salvatorian consecration. In addition, we were graced by 12 years of his wisdom in leading and visiting Salvatorians around the world as the seventh Superior General. I suppose we all



¹ FRANCIS. Homily in the Saint Peters Basílica, on 21 November 2020

admired his ability to lead with humility, to adapt to change and his availability for the Salvatorian mission in different countries.

I still have vivid memories of 1979, when I was a Salvatorian novice in Brazil. One day the novice master surprised me by appointing me to meet the Superior General of the Salvatorians at the airport in the city of Campinas. It was the first time I met Fr. Gerard and from the very beginning, I saw myself in front of a Salvatorian of great kindness, humble and with an infectious smile.



As fate would have it, decades later we would meet many other times, but in a very different context, having to carry out the same task that he carried out with great wisdom, calling the Salvatorians to unity, because only if we walk together will we go far. How much I would like to express once again our gratitude to Fr. Gerard for

having accompanied us as an older confrere who knew how to listen patiently, who spoke with serenity and never boasted of his wisdom.

Although we were aware of his illness, it was our turn in these days to receive the news we did not want to hear. Since the news of his death, the Mother House community in Rome has placed a candle and flowers in front of the photograph of Fr. Gerard, our Superior General from 1975 to 1987. As I stood in front of his portrait, three feelings came to my hearth that I would like to share with all of you, and particularly with my Salvatorian confreres present here.

The first is the feeling of the memory of someone who has been the guide of the Society in the context of the great post-Vatican II challenges. It is important to remember this moment in history under the guidance of Fr. Gerard. This takes us back to the roots of our Salvatorian history and that makes us strong. Because we feel rooted in an apostolic community that walks with the Church. We are not the protagonists of everything, and we are not the only ones. We have a past that has been written by Fr. Gerard and so many others who made a journey before us. Let us ask the good Lord today to give us this virtue of memory.

The second is a sense of loss, but also of hope. Gerard is no longer with us; his cold body here is only the husk of the wheat seed that germinated for eternity. This is the fate that awaits us all. However, death does not have the last word. For we have learned from the Gospel that all life given has a taste of eternity and this hope does not disappoint. That is why we carry the hope that we will meet again, together with God who awaits us with open arms. I believe that Fr. Gerard, in the afterlife of glory, will sustain us and help us to live in unity in our history, here and now. Let us ask the good God to give us also this virtue of hope.

The third sentiment is that of the great importance of the Salvatorians who inspire us to follow Jesus Christ in the footsteps of Blessed Francis Jordan. Especially when we are discouraged and no longer know how to move forward. Fr. Gerard has been a generous Salvatorian, with a good sense of humour and always available. His example invites us to go out generously, joyfully and with availability, and asks us not to close in on ourselves. His story is an invitation to a life rooted in Jesus Christ. Many of our projects today are surely fruits of the seeds that he and so many other Salvatorians sowed. So the message we inherit from him is to go forward committed to the Gospel, proclaiming it and bearing witness, sharing the best that we are and have. Let us ask the good God to give us also this virtue of walking in the same direction.

Dear Fr. Gerard, today we bury your body, and we accompany you with these sentiments of memory, of hope and of walking together towards the same goal. Today's Gospel reminds us of God's boundless and gratuitous love and his untiring desire that all may have Eternal Life. Gathered here we make our thanksgiving and our supplications that God the Father may give you true life forever, life in the Risen One, life of joy and peace.

In the company of our Founder, Blessed Francis Jordan and so many Salvatorians who are in glory, pray for our Society in these changing times of today. Pray for your confreres and friends who will always carry you in our hearts, until the day we meet again!

Thank you, Fr. Gerard!

