

**HOMILY BY HIS GRACE ARCHBISHOP JOHN HA
BRO. ALBINUS' FUNERAL MASS
*8TH AUGUST 2013***

Death is a reality that everyone will have to go through. For non-believers, it is the end of life and one's body rots away as it is eaten up by worms or disintegrates into earth. For believers in God there is life – a next life, whatever form one's faith tells them it will take. For us Christians, this life is eternal life in the kingdom of God prepared for us since the foundation of the world. Seen in this light, death is not an end but a passage from earthly life to eternal life in God's Kingdom. This eternal life is a share in God's own life for which He created us in His own image.

The Gospel reading selected for this requiem Mass for Brother Albinus presents us the way to this eternal life in God's Kingdom. It has to do with services rendered to "little ones". These "little ones" are specified through concrete examples – those in need of food and drink, the naked, the stranger, the sick and those in prison. In essence, the "little ones" are those who lack basic needs and to some extent even human dignity because they have been deprived of opportunities, neglected, oppressed, belittled and marginalized, and perhaps even robbed of their basic rights.

A shocking and striking point Jesus makes in the Gospel reading is carried by His words: "I tell you solemnly, in so far as you did this to one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did it to me." Indeed, He calls these needy and deprived, oppressed and despised, neglected and marginalized people "brothers of mine" (a generic term which includes sisters as well) and identifies Himself with them. This is not an empty identification and solidarity, for Jesus Himself too suffered the same deprivation and oppression as they. Yet, He had come into our world to bring us salvation which in its double content comprises forgiveness of sins and a share of God's eternal life. Paradoxically, it was our rejection and crucifixion of Jesus that led to His resurrection whereby He brought us salvation.

Yes, we rejected Jesus; but He still lived His life for us. In this way, so the first reading, taken from St. Paul's Letter to the Romans, affirms: "Christ both died and came to life; it was so that He might be Lord both of the dead and the living... By my life – it is the Lord who speaks – every knee shall bend before me, and every tongue shall praise God." In effect, this reading affirms Jesus' return to His Father's right hand where He wields the power to give us a share in His divine and eternal life and awaits our arrival to do so.

Bro. Albinus was one who zealously strove to follow this way by dedicating his whole life to "the least of Christ's brothers and sisters". At the age of 14 in 1944, he responded to Christ's call of him to join the Brothers of the Christian Schools to educate the young. He came to Kuching in 1960 and taught in St. Joseph's School where he later became Principal. From Kuching he was transferred to Sibü in 1970 and became Principal of Sacred Heart School in 1972. Retirement is a word not found in Bro. Albinus' dictionary. Officially retired in 1987, he proceeded to St. Patrick's School, Kuching, a private school started by the Brothers, to head its A-Levels department. While this private school had eventually to be closed down, Brother did not stop working. He moved on to the St. Joseph's Parish Tuition Centre.

In all these educational endeavours of his, Brother had just one goal in mind – to walk in the footsteps of the Lord Jesus and serve Him in the least of His brothers and sisters. His commitment to the "lost, the least and the last" propelled him to set up the LaSalle Foundation in Kuching to upgrade the education standards of poor children in the city as well as in villages. Over the last decade or so he had been selflessly dedicating himself to this cause.

Brother's dedication and commitment to the education of the young, especially the "lost, the least and the last" never wavered. That was because his desire to follow the Lord was strong and consistent, persistent and persevering. He saw in all the young he was serving the Lord Jesus Himself who had come to serve and not to be served.

In the words of the first reading for this Mass and in the profound experience of those of us who were his students, Brother Albinus' life has influenced us. For sure, we former students of his owe a great deal to him for who and what we are now. It is very likely that now his death is exerting an impact on us as well. The fact that we are gathered here for his funeral Mass seems to confirm it: we are drawn here by him. Indeed, we love him; we are grateful to him; we have been inspired by him; and we want to express our gratitude to him by being here at his requiem Mass and funeral.

Brother Albinus was indeed a great man, a great educationist and a great religious. But his greatness did not lie in his position as a top man in authority in the Government or in any social stratum. Rather, his greatness lay in his selfless dedication to the least of all Christ's brothers and sisters, to the "lost, the least and the last", to find them and integrate them in society as people with dignity and respect, as Christ would have done. Indeed, in all his dedicated services to the young, Bro. Albinus responded to Christ's challenge to His disciples who were arguing which of them was the greatest: "If anyone wants to be first, he must make himself last of all and servant of all... Anyone who welcomes one of these little children in my name, welcomes me and anyone who welcomes me welcomes not me but the one who sent me" (Mk. 9:35,37). Brother Albinus was faithful to his vocation as a religious educationist because he saw Christ in us. Now we, his students of distant and recent past, appreciate him because clearly or opaquely we see Christ in him. For we have experienced Christ's love for us through him.

In today's first reading, St. Paul says, "It is to God that each of us must give an account of himself." Bro. Albinus' selfless dedication to God and to the students God had entrusted to his care was deeply rooted in his faith in God and in his desire to be totally accountable to God. This faith and desire of his lived in all earnestness, as we have experienced it, give us the hope that he will hear Christ's words clearly, "Come, you whom my Father has blessed, take for your heritage the kingdom prepared for you since the foundation of the world." There he stands to enjoy a share in God's eternal life.

Because we believe that Bro. Albinus is alive in Christ, allow me to express on behalf of all here present, especially those of us who were his students our sentiments of gratitude to him.

Brother Albinus, with sincere hearts we thank you for your selfless dedication to us. In your mind, you had only one interest – that all of us under your care would do well in our studies and in our lives. In your faith in Christ, you saw Him in us as you walked in His footsteps to serve us. You strove for greatness not according to the standards of the world, but according to the standards of Christ. You were great by being the last, the servant of all. You left the running of St. Joseph's and Sacred Heart Schools to your former students and you proceeded to move on to new areas of need – to serve the “lost, the least and the last”, poor students in the city and in kampongs. Many such students benefited from this humble service of yours. Your example of humility and love is your greatest legacy for us. Our prayer, Brother, is that you enjoy the eternal life which Christ brought to all of us and for which you strove to live your life in His footsteps. Remember us to Christ whom you served and sought to imitate so that we will all meet at His feet in His kingdom. Farewell, Brother. May you rest in God's peace.