



**Funeral for Bishop Victor Galeone
Vespers Homily by Msgr. Mike Morgan, J.C.L.
Cathedral Basilica of St. Augustine
June 5, 2023**

On an occasion such as this, it's customary to begin by offering condolences to Bishop Victor Galeone's family and friends, and really, in this case, to all the faithful of the Diocese of St. Augustine, and those condolences are certainly offered to each one of you.

In one sense this is a time of sadness because Bishop Galeone – a priest for more than 62 years, and a bishop for more than ten years – is no longer with us. But I'm not sure Bishop Galeone himself would approve of this. You see, Bishop Galeone wrote a book, mostly, I think, while he was still at the Trappist Monastery at Monck's Corner, S.C. It's titled, "Joyful Good News: for Young and Old." It's available on Amazon.com.

Bishop Galeone's book is the story of a father who had just gotten some lab results back which confirmed that he had terminal cancer. This father had the unenviable task of telling his older children the bad news. He said to the children, "Yes, I have very good news. My doctor says the tumor is malignant and inoperable." A stunned silence followed, and the older children began to sob. Dad, you can't be serious. How could that be good news? "Oh, yes, it is," the dad continued. Let us praise the Lord! so, he's going to call me home and he's given me advance notice so I can prepare myself even better to meet him."

Some might recall that Bishop Galeone kept a journal for many years, and this story was originally from his journal of Oct. 28, 2009. I think it perfectly expresses how Bishop Galeone lived his life – in joyful expectation and anticipation of the world to come. So, I think Bishop Galeone would probably prefer cheers and songs and happiness on this occasion when he finally comes face to face with the Lord, who was always the love of his life.

You know when I was asked to give this homily I thought, wow, what to say. It's been so many years since I worked for Bishop Galeone, or since I've seen him. I last saw him, along with Father John Tetlow – we visited him in Maryland probably six or seven years ago. So, what to say? Well, have you ever heard of something called Bard? It's Google's entry into the field of Artificial Intelligence (AI). Why not plug in Bishop Victor Galeone and Vespers homily and see what comes out? I've heard so much about AI lately, so I decided to give it a try. This is what I got:

"We gather here today to celebrate the life of Bishop Victor Galeone, a man who dedicated his life to the service of God and the Church." So far, so good – a bit generic but we could work

with it. And then Bard continues, “he will be greatly missed by his wife, his children, grandchildren and his friends and family.” So much for AI. As Bishop Galeone would have wanted this to be a happy occasion, I think he would have gotten a big kick out of what AI wrote about him. But the part about being missed by his family – his biological family, his Baltimore church family and his family here in the Diocese of St. Augustine, is certainly true.

Bishop Galeone often spoke about his family – his mother and father and close relatives. He would tell stories about them all the time. There was one elderly aunt, his mother’s sister, still alive in southern Italy, and Bishop Galeone would make the trip to visit her whenever he could. One summer when he went, he set off to celebrate a private Mass at the local parish. The parish priest said, not so fast without a celebret – a card to show he was in good standing with the church. Bishop Galeone tried everything to convince the pastor, but no luck. Anyway, who would sign the celebret of a bishop? We had the task of cooking up some sort of official-looking document for his future trips. These trips to Italy were just one example of his devotion to his family – always eager to honor his deceased mother by visiting her sister.

And then there was Bishop Galeone’s Baltimore Archdiocesan family. Many a story would be told about life in the Church of Baltimore – all told with love and affection and humor. Right from the beginning, when Bishop Galeone’s appointment as Bishop of St. Augustine was announced in 2001, a seminary classmate of mine from Baltimore called me to rave about Msgr. Vic, who was in his priest support group. A pastor’s pastor Msgr. Vic was said to be, and a good and supportive friend to all the members of the support group.

My seminary classmate turned out to be right about our new bishop, and I think – just my opinion – that Bishop Galeone would have been the happiest person in the world to have remained as a pastor in his beloved Baltimore, doing all those things that a pastor does, from the mundane administrative-type work to especially the spiritual care of souls. Bishop Galeone shined as a simple pastor. But despite his love for being a pastor in his home diocese, Bishop Galeone was loyal to the Holy Father. I suspect it pained him to do so, but when he was asked if he accepted the Holy Father’s episcopal appointment, out of a great sense of duty he said “yes.” You know, not everybody says “yes” to that question.

As the ninth Bishop of St. Augustine, I believe Bishop Galeone will first and foremost be remembered as a teacher. And after all, that’s what a bishop is – the chief teacher of the faith in the diocese. He cared deeply about teaching the faith, especially to youth and young adults. For example, he put great effort into his confirmation homilies, and I’ve already mentioned his book, “Joyful Good News: For Young and Old.” During his time in office, Bishop Galeone saw a great need to promote the church’s teachings about marriage and family, and so it was under his guidance and direction that Natural Family Planning information and instruction became a part of marriage preparation in this diocese. Always a teacher, Bishop Galeone penned three pastoral letters, the first, predictably on marriage, “Marriage: A Communion of Life and Love.” Then two more – “Stewardship: A Discipleship of Love,” and his last one in 2009, “The Power of Love.”

In “The Power of Love,” Bishop Galeone wrote, “It is through the power of love that we achieve holiness as individuals and greatness as a society, and not through the radical and unfettered “isms” of this world.” As we look around the world today, some 14 years after that was written, I think we have all the confirmation we need, that Bishop Galeone was right!

If you’re not convinced by now that Bishop Galeone was first a teacher, then recall that, as a priest he served for a time as the principal of St. Paul’s Latin School in Baltimore. More than just the principal, Father Galeone also taught Latin, and indeed he remained a Latin scholar. So much so that in 2011 when new translations of the Mass were being proposed, he and a few others took

a very vocal stand at the U.S. Bishops' Conference against those new translations. And if you happened to be around the Catholic Center during those times, and standing still for more than a few seconds, you were likely to get a short course in Latin grammar, and a very detailed explanation of why the new translations were a grammatical abomination. But to his credit, once the decision was made and the new translations went into effect, Bishop Galeone loyally obeyed, and not a peep was ever again heard on the subject.

Recall also, that Bishop Galeone was a missionary – essentially a teacher, who taught people about Jesus in far-away places. He spent around 12 years as a member of the St. James Society serving as a missionary priest in Peru. That experience deeply affected him I believe, and I know that it was another source of many stories, some serious but many interesting and light-hearted. I know, as well, that while he was the bishop of St. Augustine, Bishop Galeone never forgot the good people of his parishes in Peru.

I think that the most challenging part of being a bishop for Bishop Galeone was governance – governing the diocese. That was sometimes difficult for him. By that I don't mean that Bishop Galeone could not or did not govern – he most certainly did. But sometimes, acts of governance require hard decisions that adversely affect others. Bishop Galeone was very empathetic; he put on a serious face much of the time, but really, to use an overused and even trite phrase, he genuinely felt the pain of those whom his decisions affected. He did what needed to be done, but often with a heavy heart and yes, on occasion, even with tears in his eyes.

I do remember one act of governance, though, that gave Bishop Galeone great delight. It seems he very much disliked the hymn, "Gather Us In." As fate would have it, that song ended up as the opening hymn at one too many Masses where Bishop Galeone was the celebrant. Finally, he had had enough. As the chief liturgist of the diocese, he banned that hymn from any Mass that he celebrated. What fun is it to be a bishop if you can't throw your weight around every once in a while?

I'm not sure what category this falls into, and it doesn't really matter, but Bishop Galeone saw a great need and a pent-up desire within the diocese for the establishment of the permanent diaconate. By this time – I think around 2005 or 2006 – St. Augustine was one of only five or six dioceses in the country that had not officially established a permanent diaconate. The program started off pretty bare-bones and in difficult economic times for the diocese, but I think Bishop Galeone would be very happy today to see that the diaconate ministry thrives, that the formation program has been revised and improved several times, and that, no doubt, it will continue to evolve and become even better.

I think just about everything Bishop Galeone did was in one way or another a part of the bishop's office of sanctifying the People of God. From the consecration of new churches to the confirmations, to the priestly and diaconal ordinations – all of this is the work of sanctifying the faithful.

In his own sort of shy way, Bishop Galeone loved people, and he showed that love by loving life. He wasn't merely pro-life in theory; he loved all those involved in life issues: the innocent babies about to be aborted, the guilty criminals about to be executed, and those who carried out these deeds. He was most generous in giving the support of the diocese to those who supported the victims, guilty or not: like Dale Recinella, the death row chaplain at Raiford Prison, and Carole Wolfe, the founder of St. Gerard Campus for unwed mothers. One of his happiest days was the day he presented Mrs. Wolfe with a brand-new ultrasound machine for St. Gerard's very active pregnancy help ministry. As you can see, Bishop Galeone was pro-life in every sense of the word.

There's an awful lot more that could be said about Bishop Galeone and it would be fun to go on. He loved mixing with people in the parishes and at the diocese. He had lunch every day with the Catholic Center staff – and it was always the same lunch: a can of sardines and a piece of dark bread. I was hoping the official Catholic Center lunch would improve when Bishop Estévez arrived, but instead, it changed to microwave Rahman noodles.

All good things come to an end. All good men and women, all good bishops come to the end of this earthly life. Still, I can't conclude without once again mentioning the love of Bishop Galeone's life, Jesus Christ.

In his book, "Joyful Good News," Bishop Galeone tells of a dying young man in Mother Teresa's Washington, D.C. AIDS Hospice some years back. On his deathbed, he asks to be baptized. When the priest asked him for some expression of faith, the dying man whispered, "All I know is that I am miserable, and these sisters are always happy – even when I curse them. Yesterday I asked one of them why she was so happy. She answered, 'Jesus.' Well, I want this Jesus too so I can be happy." Curiously, this story has no quotes or references, and Bishop Galeone was a meticulous footnoter. I strongly suspect that this story is a first-hand experience or at least second-hand information.

Bishop Galeone wanted everybody to have this Jesus too. The bishop saw Jesus as the central figure in all human history. And even more, in his book he wrote, "While he may be the central figure of human history, in reality, Jesus wants to be the central figure of every human heart." And Bishop Galeone's passion was to do whatever he could with whatever resources he had, to bring that about; to introduce Jesus to each and every human heart.

With a bishop so inspired and a teacher so motivated, the Diocese of St. Augustine has been blessed many times over. You know, the Archdiocese of Baltimore owed us one. The fourth bishop of St. Augustine, Bishop Michael J. Curley, was taken from us to become the Archbishop of Baltimore in 1921. I think Baltimore has now paid us back in spades.

And so, now, may the soul of Bishop Vic, a good and faithful servant, through the mercy of God, rest in peace. And may the souls of all the faithful departed, through the mercy of God, rest in peace.