

## Where Will You Be When the Final Bell Tolls for Thee?

This story is as real as it gets. Though the title seems macabre, it's a story of love and the length our God goes to prove it. The story begins September the 4<sup>th</sup> 1967 in South Vietnam. We will cover the beginning of the story later. For right now we will pick up where I come in. This happened some time in the summer of 2003. I was at work with one of my protestant colleagues, who knew I was a devout Roman Catholic and whose name I will change to keep him from any embarrassment. He liked to tease me about Catholic priests and altar boys and things like that, and for the most part I would just pat him on the head, and let it go - but this day he crossed the line. I did not say anything then because we were in a crowd of people but twenty minutes or so later I walked over to his desk and let him have it with both barrels.

I said John you were in the Marine Corp weren't you? He looked up and said "you know I was." I asked him, "do you love your country?" I didn't need an answer. I knew he did. I asked him, "know anything about the Congressional Medal of Honor?" He said, "I know everything about it." I said, "good, then you know it was instituted during the Civil war, and forty million men served in the Armed Forces of the United States that could have won it. Only 2200 men have ever won the Medal of Honor and only eighteen men have ever won it twice. And only seven chaplains have ever won it, and every one was a Roman Catholic Priest! You might remember it, the next time you decide to tease one. O, by the way, they won it without a gun!" Then I just walked away. I could see tears in his eyes because he is a good man at heart.

Now, in 2005 I told this story at a family gathering at my sister's house and my brother Bob said, "that's right Paul and the last Navy Chaplain to win the CMH was Fr Vincent Capodanno." Now I know that my brother was right because there is a Knights of Columbus Council in southern California named after him. So I looked at my brother Bob and said, "that's right Bob how did you know?" He said, "I was there that day on the battlefield that morning with him when he died. He gave me absolution that morning before we went into battle." I said that this is a story I have to hear. The story he told is too long for this article but you can read it for yourself in the book called *The Grunt Padre*, by Father Daniel Mode.

About a year ago I told the story to a friend of mine at San Secondo dAsti Church her name is Noreen Considine she is a retired Naval Captain and she knew the story about Fr. Capodanno and said that she would like to meet my brother and asked his name I said, "Robert James Barone USMC Ret." I said if I could get him back into a Catholic Church I would love to have him meet you. She asked, "he doesn't go to church?" I said "not in thirty years, except for marriages and funerals, and he was an altar boy when he was a kid and is a good man. He always goes out of his way to help anyone. He is very active in the VFW and is loved by everyone who knows him." I said I would tell you a funny story about my brother Bob. He was honorable discharged in 1972 but he was never the same as he was before he went to Vietnam. After two tours in Vietnam he lost his innocence, but never lost his sense of humor. It took him 30 plus years to get his medical retirement from the Marine Corp. But when it finally came through it was a full medical retirement with a tax-free check for the rest of his life. Now it takes a lot of paper work to retire and he needed help with it so he went to his attorney. Bob had to sign the paper work. For Social Security, his company retirement program, his 401K and many

other things. After a while his lawyer said, just one thing more". Bob said, "What's that?" His lawyer answered - divorce Joan. Joan is my brother wife of 38 years. My brother looked at him and asked "why?" He answered for 600,000 dollars tax free which is half of his wife's 401K, Now, Bob said, "are you out of your mind? We are Roman Catholics and she will kill me before I get to spend a dime!" And they both laughed for a while, and after, I finished telling the story at church we all laughed. I said to Noreen, "some day I will get him back into church" and she said, "lets pray for his return." We said our goodbyes for that Sunday.

About six months went by between the times I told Noreen the story about my brother Bob's Attorney. And the next time we spoke about Fr Capodanno it was a beautiful Sunday when I saw her walking towards me and she said, "I am having a special mass said for Fr. Capodanno in Orange County. Do you think your brother would come?" I said, "I will ask." She said, "lets get him back into Church?" I said, "ok." That night I called my brother. To ask him to come to church, now you have to understand I have asked him until I was blue in the face and his answer was always, "when I die you can get me back into the church." So when I told him about the Mass for Fr. Capodanno and asked if he would like to go. He said, "for Fr. Capodanno I will go." So that night I e-mailed Noreen my brother's answer. The next time we spoke about this she said the Mass had been moved to San Secondo dAsti Catholic Church in Guasti, California and she asked if my brother was still coming I said, "I will check." She said that if he wasn't coming she was calling the whole thing off - she was determined to get him back into church. So I called him that night.

He answered the phone and I told him the Mass for Fr. Capodanno was moved to San Secondo I offered to pick him up and drive him there. He said, "no it wasn't necessary, he remembered where it was because I had my marriage blessed there. He asked, "when is the mass?" I told him it was September 3, the 42ed anniversary of Fr. Capodanno's death. Bob said, "he died on the 4<sup>th</sup>." I said, "yes, but my friend has thought of everything. It's the 3<sup>rd</sup> here, but the 4<sup>th</sup> in Vietnam." He laughed and said, "that's right! I forgot. It's been 40 years since I was there. I will see you tomorrow night." The next night Bob and my brother Alan arrived at the same time, about thirty minutes early, so we could talk and catch up on family matters. We stood outside and laughed almost the whole time. I introduced them to all of my friends, especially my co-conspirator Captain Noreen Considine, who was the chief conspirator to get him back in to church. She had the front row reserved for him, which was very thoughtful of her.

Now the Mass was a High Latin Mass with the incenses and Holy water, my brothers both, said it reminded them of when we were kids. I said that Guasti was a time machine for Catholics. Now the church in Guasti California is San Secondo d'Asti, and it is like going back in time. The women wear veils on thier heads, and we even have a dress code. Now this night, Guasti took us back to pre 1968 before Vatican two. During Fr. Marx's homily he said, as he pointed to us, that he understood that one of these young men even knew Fr. Capodanno. My brother Bob leaned over to me and said that it's been a long time since anyone has called me a young man, I said, "me too." I also said, "we are lucky Mom is not with us or she would have smacked you for talking." He said, "you know it!" When Mass was over we went outside and laughed and fooled around just as we did so long ago. All of my family, that showed up for the Mass, went to breakfast. We had a great time. We talked for hours. We said our goodbyes. I walked my brother

back to his truck and he said that he loved the Mass. I said, “you should go back on a regular basis.” He said, “I will think about it.” That’s his way of saying OK when he did not want to say yes right then. I said, “see you soon”, and as I walked back to my car I thought that was a lot of work to get him back into church. And he is worth it. How little did I know that he would need it. God’s Timing is perfect. On September the 7<sup>th</sup> 2009, four days after the Mass for Fr. Capodanno, My Beloved Brother Bob would die. It was the very next Sunday night that the Lord Our God called him home. There are no words to explain how lucky my brother was. Or was it luck? Or was it that my brother was the friend of Fr. Vincent R. Capodanno M.M., who was declared Servant of God.

My brother Bob arranged months in advance for my whole family to go to the First Marine Division’s annual Reunion at Camp Pendleton the weekend after his death. Now I do not believe in coincidences. He must have known it would be the last time we would be together. On that Saturday morning at roll call it was announced that one of there lifetime members, Robert James Barone, just passed away, and they asked for a moment of silence in his memory. As the moment began a cell phone started ringing. The song it was playing was the Marine Corp Hymn, and the owner of the phone just let it ring. And if the truth be known it was God calling, letting everyone know that, like the Marine Corp, God is always faithful, and He takes care of his own, and leaves none behind. Semper Fi Bobby, Semper Fi.

## Epilogue

This story began on September the 4<sup>th</sup> 1967 the day Fr. Capodanno was killed and it ends on September the 3<sup>rd</sup> 1967 the day before it began. How is that possible. With God all things are Possible but before we get to the end. I need to clear up some things. When I told my Protestant Friend the story about the Congressional Medal of Honor I was in error. I spent many hours on the net doing the research for this Story. I found the correct information on the Congressional Medal of Honor Recipients. On The Congressional Medal of Honor Society web page. This page is authorized by the Congress of the United States of America.

. On December the 21<sup>st</sup> 1861 Present Abraham Lincoln signed the Bill Authorizing the Congressional Medal of Honor into Law. In the 149 Years since then, there have been 3,446 recipients of this great honor. The number of men that could have won it is not known, but the number of 40,000,000 seems high to some and low to others So we will leave it at 40,000,000 until some one who knows the correct number and contacts me with it. There are only 91 living recipients, 19 double recipients, 8 chaplains, and one chaplains assistant. With the access that I have to the records I cannot prove how many were Catholic. Although in the Twentieth century the worst century for war, for the United States only four chaplains received the C.M.H. and every one of them was a Roman Catholic Priest. Now, as for my protestant colleague, he and I have become friends. He still teases me, but now he has a smile on his face when he does it. He is currently looking for a church to attend with his family. Some day when he reads this article he will realize that God used him to work a miracle for a Catholic.

I sent this Article to my sister-in-law Joan who told me that my brother Bob was sick and stayed in bed all day on September the 3<sup>rd</sup>, the day of Fr. Capodanno's Mass. So he would be up to going that night. She also told me that he died from exposure to Agent Orange and he knew he was going to die from it, for a long time. She informed me that he never whimpered or complained once, because he was and will always be a United States Marine. I told the story of Bob knowing Fr. Capodanno at his Rosary. That night many of his family and friends went on the Internet and looked up Fr. Capodanno. The next day my brother in-law, Mike Lynch told me he saw a picture on Fr. Capodanno's web site that I needed to see. I went and looked and there was a picture of Fr. Capodanno at the last mass he said. It was in what looked like a tent about 40 ft by 40 ft with the sides up so the air could go through and cool the people, and there was Fr Capodanno at the far end cleaning off the altar. The picture was Titled Fr. Capodanno's last known picture and dated September the 3<sup>rd</sup> 1967 - the day before he was killed. In the foreground was my brother standing there with some friends smoking a cigarette with his cap tilted back. Only God knows why God goes to so much work to get some one back into church but he does. To all who read this article I tell you of a truth, go find God while he might be found, for it will be better for you to be found on your way with partial payment in your hand, then to be dragged before him on the day of Judgment .If anyone wants to contact me about this article you can contact me at e/mail [pjpiisoe@verizon.net](mailto:pjpiisoe@verizon.net)

Yours in Christ,  
Paul Barone