



Commemoration Mass for Archbishop Noel Treanor Chapel for Europe - Brussels, 24th September 2024

Fr. Manuel Barrios Prieto
General Secretary of COMECE

Dear Mgr. Franco Coppola, Nuncio to Belgium and Luxembourg,

Dear Mgr John Baptist Itaruma,

Dear Fr. Dalibor Renić,

Dear Fr Bernd,

Dear friends.

I greet you all wholeheartedly and thank you very much for being here today, in the Chapel for Europe, to commemorate together, celebrating this Mass, **Archbishop Noël Treanor**, Nuncio to the European Union, who passed away unexpectedly six weeks ago. We want to remember him today with **gratitude, faith and hope**, but we also feel sorrow and are astonished by his leaving us so soon. Mgr Itaruma was with him that day, Sunday 11th August, when he died, and he called me soon after to give me the sad and shocking news. He told me that Noël was about to celebrate Mass in the Nunciature that morning when he didn't feel well and said that he wanted to go to the hospital. He also mentioned that in his family there was a history of heart problems. An ambulance was called but when it arrived the Nuncio had already collapsed and it was not possible to reanimate him.

I have known Archbishop Noël for the last 5 years, since I have been Secretary General of COMECE. During this time, he participated in the monthly meetings of our Standing Committee, first as bishop delegate of Ireland for COMECE and then as Nuncio. I was able to get to know and highly appreciate his outstanding human and spiritual qualities. I am sure that many of you who are here today have known him for more time and can also give witness to this. There was also something that united me to him in a special way as he has been Secretary General of COMEC for many years, from 1993 to 2008, before he was appointed bishop of Down and Connor. The episcopal motto he chose was “*Sicut filii lucis ambulate*” (Walk as children of light). After the also sad and unexpected death of former Nuncio Mgr. Aldo Giorndano, as a consequence of Covid in December 2021, Mgr Treanor was appointed Nuncio in November 2022 and made Archbishop. He managed after much waiting to present his credential letters to the President of the Commission in late July 2023. Noël Treanor was very cautious with this and did not want to start with full force his mission before presenting these letters. This means that the effective time in which he exercised fully as Nuncio was little more than one year. Of the many things he has left us during these intense years of ministry I will just mention two. One is his great interest and his work for the **dialogue between faith and culture**. “*A faith that does not become culture is not fully accepted, not entirely thought out, not faithfully lived*”, Saint John Paul II said. Secondly, and particularly important for us here in Brussels, is his work for the establishment and implementing of **Article 17 in the Treaty on the Functioning of the EU**, the article that establishes the obligation for a regular dialogue between the EU and the Churches. I consider this an important legacy he has left us for which we have to work hard, o maintain and strengthen it, especially in these

challenging times of growing secularism, indifference, antagonism and ignorance of religion and its contribution to society.

I said at the beginning that we want to **commemorate today Archbishop Noël Treanor with gratitude, faith and hope**. Gratitude to God for his life, for having met him and for having shared with him time, thoughts, projects, dreams, emotions... For having been enriched by his presence. But we also want to remember him today **with faith and hope**. To do this the readings we just heard can help us. In occasions like these, when we are bewildered and sad and find it difficult to say something, it is good to let the Word of God speak, which is the one that can really console, enlighten us and give us meaning. We **have chosen for the readings of today the same ones** that were read in the Requiem Mass celebrated for him in Belfast' Cathedral.

In the **first reading from the Book of Wisdom** we heard the following powerful words: *“The souls of the righteous are in the hand of God, and no torment shall touch them. They seemed, in the view of the foolish, to be dead; and their passing away was thought an affliction and their going forth from us, utter destruction. But they are in peace”*. As Christians we **believe in a God that takes care of us and his people**, that is the Lord of history, and we also believe that “all things work for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose”, as Paul says in the Letter to the Romans. That is why for many of us it is difficult to understand, and maybe also to accept, the death of Noël. We thought that his ministry as bishop and now as Nuncio was designed to last some time and bear many fruits. **But things have gone differently**. As the prophet Isaiah says: *“for my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways”*. Yes, for us it is difficult many times to understand the ways of God, but we trust in Him and we acknowledge and accept that we are his creatures. We

also believe that the souls of the just live in peace as the Book of Wisdom tells us.

The **second reading from the Letter of St. Paul to the Romans** is possibly the best description of the spiritual life of the believer that we find in the New Testament. This life has two dimensions: the **present and the future**. For our present life, Paul says that as children of God we are led by the Spirit of God and that this Spirit liberates us from fear and slavery and makes us aware of our condition of adopted children of God. It is this Spirit that enables us to have a filial relation, a parent-child relation, with God and address him as Father, using the same word Jesus used in his prayer: **Abbá**. Jesus so addressed God the Father, even in his moments of extreme solitude, pain and suffering. It is important for us to become aware of this: we are children of God, we can really speak to Him as our Father. But Paul also mentions the **future condition of Christians**: *“if children, then we are heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ”*. Bishop Alan McGuckian, in the Requiem Mass for Noël celebrated in Belfast, said: *“Here at his funeral Mass, we remember that Archbishop Noël was a family man and much loved friend of many people; he was a very accomplished individual; a priest, a bishop, an archbishop, a papal nuncio. All of those things are hugely important but on his funeral day we are invited to remember that none of those is the most important. The most important thing is that Noël Treanor was baptised and born into new life in Christ. The words written by St Paul to the Romans that we heard earlier were meant for him”*. The words of St. Paul to the Romans that we are heirs of God, heirs of eternal life, are certainly meant for Noël Treanor; and they are also meant for each one of us: we are “heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ”.

I think that a very important aspect of the mission of Christians in our world today is being **persons of hope**, men and women of hope. But not an ingenuous

hope or a mundane and materialist hope, but a **hope based in our faith in a good and caring God**, in a God that is faithful and fulfils his promises, a God who wants our good in this world and promises us eternal life. In the midst of so much uncertainty, ignorance, darkness, pride and evil that we live in this world, we are called to be men and women of hope. “*Sicut filii lucis ambulate*” (Walk as children of light), as was the motto of Bishop Noël.

In the Gospel that was proclaimed we also find the theme of hope. **Jesus has prepared a place for each of one of us** so we can be with him for ever. This is the real beatitude, being with Jesus for ever. And to attain this we know the way: Jesus himself, his divine-human person, is the **way, the truth and our life**.

Dear brothers and sisters, let us know continue this Mass praying for Noël, his family, the mission of the Church, also here before the European Institutions, and all our needs. Let us also rejoice, as we prayed in the Psalm: “*I rejoiced when I heard them say: ‘Let us go to God’s house’*”. Here is God’s house today as we celebrate this Mass together which is an anticipation of the banquet of the Kingdom of God. We pray the merciful God that Noël can be sitting at this banquet where a place has also been prepared for us.

Amen.