



Dear People of the Lord,
Paz de Cristo.

Sis. Homa, Sis. Judy, Bro. Bracamontes, grandchildren and all the Rodriguez family, on behalf of my family and myself, from the Fountain of Life Church in Miami, and the entire Apostolic Assembly of the Faith in Christ Jesus, nationally and internationally, we give our deepest condolences.

Today is a very sad day for the Church, but also a day of victory! We are gathered to celebrate the life of Bishop President Baldemar Rodriguez as he lived amongst us.

Normally in situations like this, I preach my sermons as I always do, with my notes, but this time I have decided to read it. There are so many things I would like to share that I do not want anything to escape of what God has put in my heart.

There are events and circumstances in life that define the life of a man, and I feel that this is one of them. We have come together to honor and celebrate the life of a man who has definitely left a mark on the lives of people who had contact with him.

In April of this year, God gave us the privilege to meet at the General Offices with Bishop President Baldemar Rodriguez, that day was special. God granted us one of the most beautiful, entertaining, friendly meetings we had ever had. There we had an open dialog, sincere and looking forward to the future.

We had other meetings, which served to bridge relations between Bishop Baldemar (as we called him affectionately) and the Apostolic Assembly. At the April meeting, we could see the spirit of brotherhood and harmony was building something solid.

On several occasions, I called to accelerate the process, and as usual, with a gentle tone of voice he kept saying, "Brother President, do not rush. As you are going, you are going well". Despite his human frailties and diseases that were attacking him, he always had a smile, with a word of wise encouragement.

I remember on one occasion, when I arrived at the office in April with Bishop Tafoya, I asked Bishop Baldemar to sit in the presidential chair for a moment, and with great respect he said, "No brother, that chair is yours, you are the President."

Every one of us here have come to celebrate the life of a man, who ultimately, when he was among us as our leader, was a giant!

This is neither the place nor the time to talk about the events that unfortunately transpired so that Bishop Baldemar Rodriguez would no longer be within the ranks of the Apostolic Assembly.

Therefore, I ask you in the love of the Lord, that today we celebrate the years when he was leader amongst us. I ask you today that we celebrate the beautiful legacy he left us as Bishop President, Bishop Supervisor, pastor and apostolic hymn writer.

There will not be a man in our church that compares to Bishop President Baldemar Rodriguez. His 16 years as Presiding Bishop and 8 years as vice-president, cannot be repeated by any mortal. And something more transcendental in his story is that he was the President during the change of the millennium. In the history of the Global Church, that honor, has only been acquired by two men, and Bishop Baldemar Rodriguez was one of them. He did not boast of this great honor given by the Creator of the Universe, but that was monumental and historic.

His life among us deserves a celebration like this, his work deserves a celebration like this, his leadership calls for a celebration like this, and finally, achieving the highest positions among us, deserves a celebration like this.

When a giant withdraws from amongst mortals, he will always draw the attention of everyone, and everyone will want to be part of the farewell. Everyone wants to be there because they want to see what kind of man is capable of undertaking so much. It is sometimes thought that these men are not mere men, but super-men, and when they see them lying in the coffin; then, they understand that they were men of flesh and blood, with many imperfections and weaknesses. Although they were fragile, God gave them a special grace and strength to do the job. God always helped them to do extraordinary things, and to appear to the public as men who had no difficulties or problems; but the reality was different. When God sends us into battle, He is the one who helps us obtain the victory if we are faithful.

Someone said, "If you do not walk in their ways and live their experiences, wear their shoes and socks, you will never understand the other person." How true! To understand a pastor, you have to be a pastor; to understand a President, you have to be President. "

It is with this understanding, that I can understand the life of Bishop President Baldemar Rodriguez. I think I'm in a position to say some things that only presidents can say to each other.

There were things I heard from Bishop Rodriguez when he was our President for four years before retiring from the Board in 2002 and I was the Secretary of National Missions from 1998 to 2006. At the beginning of my administration as bishop of National Missions, I shared my vision and told him what I thought God wanted to do with our Church. Not only did he congratulate me, but he helped me to carry out my vision. I came to the Board as the Bishop of Florida, and although I had many dreams, fears were also reflected upon my face. He would say to me. "Calm down Bishop, take it easy!" Bishop Baldemar could see in me and in many men like me, no threat, but the potential that was within us and he helped develop that servant spirit. Only a leader who has vision and ability to train others is capable of such a thing.

But that was Bro. Baldemar (as we call him with great respect, or Bishop President) that we had known for years, a man with a great sense of humor, and an immense willingness to help others. From my youth, I had heard of him, of his sermons, and his songs until I met him

personally when he went to the mission field in Buenos Aires, Argentina. This was in 1977. When Bishop Baldemar Rodriguez arrived, my pastor, Bishop Alfredo Lopez, who was the President of the Church in Argentina, asked me to host him and take him wherever he wanted. I told him I would gladly do it, and God gave me that opportunity. Among the things he wanted to do, he told me, "Brother, I want to buy a leather jacket, I was told that the leather here is good." I told him yes, but before we purchased the jacket, we had to exchange currency because the dollar was not accepted as payment. We went to exchange the dollars for pesos. Bishop Baldemar gave me \$100, and with the exchange we were given 10 million pesos. When I gave them to him, he was surprised and thought we should call other brothers, because he had 10 million pesos. He had never walked with millions! When we bought the leather jacket, the price was 9.8 million pesos and we had some left over so we bought two ice creams cones!

It was at that convention that he preached a sermon about the hummingbird. Hummingbird translates in Argentina, "*Pica Flor*" but that means one who likes hanging out with many women. So, when he asked how many wanted to be "*Pica Flores*", of course nobody answered, until he explained what it meant, and said, "I mean those who like to extract nectar from the Word of God" and then everyone said, Amen!

Giants leave giants footprints. They are men who are characterized in certain areas of their lives that definitely touch and influence the lives of others. These mortals leave a legacy, a path. They are not perfect, and much less lead a perfect trajectory, but still manage to make a mark in the lives of thousands, and also make a mark in the progress and development of the Church.

• **Psalm 116: 15 says: Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints.**

For many, this is a somewhat confusing statement, because at the time of death nothing is pleasant. That's because we do not want to separate because of the weight and sadness of separation. There are mixed feelings we cannot control, but the Lord comforts us through the love of the brothers, family and friends. For God, it is honorable, because for God it is a homecoming for His children. It is not for everyone who dies, it is only for the death of His saints. Men and women who did the best they could do for the time God gave them to serve.

When a little girl asked her father to explain the death of her mother, he, in pain asked God to give him the right words to explain the situation. He took her to a small stream of water coming from the mountain that was near the house. While they were both there, they put a small wooden boat in the water. The father said, when you do not see it anymore, I want you to tell me, and after a few minutes, the girl cried. "Daddy, Daddy, I do not see the boat anymore, it has disappeared" The father led her to the other side of the stream and to the surprise of the girl, there was the wooden boat. The father said, "When we stop seeing it, it's because it was approaching the other side. We can't see your mommy here, but that is because she is approaching the other side. When you and I get there, we'll see her again."

Today, we say goodbye to a man who served God for 24 years on the International Board of the Directors of the Apostolic Assembly, besides being District Bishop and pastor until the last days of his life. He was a father and a husband who knew how to win the affection of many of those around him. We will not see him anymore, because today he is closer to the other side, though his works will never be forgotten.

• Revelation 14:13 I heard a voice from heaven saying unto me, Write, Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from henceforth Yes, says the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours, and their works do follow them.

We who are here, we who live, we have the option to choose which are the works we want to remember. All human beings have chapters in their life story that are enjoyable, and others that are not. But for the welfare and the health of the Church, we have preferred to remember the chapters where this servant of God did everything in his power to pave the way for the generations that were to follow in the work of the Apostolic Assembly's growth.

Many of us, who are in these high positions, are only enjoying what others did for the Church. Men wept, who preached, who advised. Men who strove to bring the Church to other levels, who wept when situations got criticism, who preached what they believed, they advised, they did all they could with the resources they had and in the context in which God granted them life.

We have decided to remember his sermons, songs, anecdotes, his poetry, his humor, his advice, his famous phrases, his tactful calls to attention, his words of encouragement, and his tears with mine, in times of pain. All this is impossible to forget. Bishop President Baldemar Rodriguez, maybe not to all, but in many of us, left a very important mark of leadership, and that is precisely what we are remembering, on this very special day and ceremony.

He was our president for 16 years and our Vice-President for 8; we cannot ignore this special legacy. He never asked us to do any of this, nor did the family either, this is something that the Board unanimously decided to do with much joy, because we wanted to celebrate the life and career of a great servant of God amongst us and also because we are thinking of the future of the Church.

A Church that is crying out for healing and peace. Maybe thinking of healing and peace is an ideal, but in personal talks with Bishop Baldemar, we were both on the same page, both thinking the same thing. During the months of my presidency, our talks revolved around the thought, "seek peace with all, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord."

We were very close to reaching agreements that would benefit us all, although the mechanisms were unclear, but God went ahead of us.

God called him to His presence before anything. I imagine God and Bishop Baldemar had a talk the day God decided to take Bishop Baldemar. Like I said, they could already see the sunlight that pierced the dense storm clouds. The Holy Spirit was guiding us in the midst of this turbulent water, but God went ahead of us.

Surely, at that moment of stillness amid the dialysis process, God in His sovereign will decided to take him, perhaps singing one of his hymns.

The creator of the universe, sent angels to take him because his mission was complete, and in his heart there was peace. It was not necessary to suffer any more, and the work that he had begun was on track, when suddenly a supernatural peace came over him, without pain, without complaint, he closed his eyes and went to his eternal rest.

He rested going with the Lord. He fought, won, and now it was time to rest. The Apostol Paul even said just before his departure:

• 2 Timothy 4: 7 I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith. 8 Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord the Righteous judge should give at that day; and not to me only, but unto all them also who love His appearing.

God's people and leaders, it is time to understand that it is our responsibility to continue this legacy that Bishop President Baldemar Rodriguez started. And there are few who can say, I was in that position. Most rest in the Lord, but now it's our turn. Now we have to fight for a church that loves God and his children. We have a moral obligation to continue the peaceful and constructive dialogue. Now it's our turn. The generation that follows us, is watching, and desires this flag fly free of prejudice, in unity and victory!

In our last personal talks with Bishop Baldemar, we talked about:

1. Establishing a Peaceful Church, in a spirit of peace.
2. Building a church where the Apostolic flag could freely be flown everywhere in the world.
3. Having a church where the brothers could greet each other with "*Paz de Cristo*" without rancor or bitterness.
4. A Church where one day we could "all together" celebrate the Lord's Supper and the washing of feet, as we felt the communion of the Holy Spirit amongst us.

They were ideals, they were dreams, but they were our dreams. I want to tell the church who have gathered here on this day, Bishop President Baldemar Rodriguez is resting in God's mercy. There was a strong storm in the last years of his life, but he was able to overcome it, he was able to maneuver his boat. A storm that had continued until several months ago, and with the help of God, now had subsided as we see how the boat was approaching the shore peacefully.

Let me conclude by quoting the Apostle Paul.

1 Thessalonians 4:13-18:

13 But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope.

14 For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him.

15 For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent them which are asleep.

16 For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first:

17 Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord.

18 Wherefore comfort one another with these words.

This is the hope of Christians throughout the world, to rest first and then wait for the coming of the Almighty to live with Him for eternity. This is the way of those who love God. This is the way

of the Presidents that God calls before us; and this is the way for all of those who want to serve God with all of their heart.

We do not say to Bishop President Baldemar Rodriguez, “goodbye but see you soon”, because the promise is firm, and He who promised is faithful. Nothing and no one can break His words and His promises.

I want to conclude with this prayer:

Lord, right now I ask that You strengthen his wife, children and grandchildren, that you put comfort in their hearts as only You know how to do. I pray for the family of Bishop President Baldemar Rodriguez, that You put peace in their hearts, to give them the strength they need to deal with whatever comes. I pray for his congregation that You allowed him to pastor in his last days, and now left in Your hands, so that you take care of these sheep. And finally, I pray for the Apostolic Church, so that You may give us the wisdom to that which began with Bishop Baldemar, may continue on with us. Not necessarily to put it in our assembly directory, but to make peace between all who comply with Your divine purpose.

I ask in the mighty name of Jesus Christ. Amen

As a fellow laborer in Christ and
A servant of all of you!

Dr. J. Fortino
Bishop President

