

Mauno Koivisto
The Funeral Service
Cathedral of Helsinki, 25 May 2017
Eero Huovinen, Bishop emeritus of Helsinki

Embargo at ca 2.30 pm

Prelude

Choir

Floral tributes

Ensemble music

Hymn 600 from the *Finnish Hymnal*

Invocation and Introductory Words

In the name of the Father + and Son and Holy Spirit.

Honoured and beloved Tellervo Koivisto,
Dearly beloved Assi ja Heikki,
Dear family, friends and colleagues of Mauno Koivisto

We are here to send off on his final journey a beloved husband and father, a Finnish man, and the ninth President of the Republic of Finland. Longing and sorrow fill our hearts, but we also feel deep gratitude for all the good things that came our way through Mauno Koivisto.

We are gathered here in this church together with all the people of Finland. In the words of an old prayer we can say: "Into your hands I entrust my spirit. Lord, you redeem me to freedom, you faithful God." May trust in the almighty and merciful God be our refuge and consolation.

Psalm

Lord, You have been our dwelling place in all generations.
Before the mountains were born
Or You gave birth to the earth and the world,
Even from everlasting to everlasting, You are God.
You turn man back into dust
And say, "Return, O children of men."
For a thousand years in Your sight
Are like yesterday when it passes by,
Or as a watch in the night.
You have swept them away like a flood, they fall asleep;
In the morning they are like grass which sprouts anew.
In the morning it flourishes and sprouts anew;
Toward evening it fades and withers away.
So teach us to number our days,
That we may present to You a heart of wisdom.
(Psalm 90:1-6, 12, NASB)

Prayer

Almighty God, dear Heavenly Father. Through the suffering of Your Son, and through His joyous resurrection, You have opened the door to eternal life for us. Help us to place our trust in Christ with all our hearts. We praise You here, and we will praise You forevermore in heaven. Hear us for the sake of Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit eternally. Amen.

Choir: “Sydämeni laulu” [Song of my heart]

Scripture Readings

For we know that if the earthly tent which is our house is torn down, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. For indeed in this *house* we groan, longing to be clothed with our dwelling from heaven, inasmuch as we, having put it on, will not be found naked. For indeed while we are in this tent, we groan, being burdened, because we do not want to be unclothed but to be clothed, so that what is mortal will be swallowed up by life. Now He who prepared us for this very purpose is God, who gave to us the Spirit as a pledge.

(2 Cor 5:1-5)

[Jesus said:] “Do not let your heart be troubled; believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father’s house are many dwelling places; if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you. If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself, that where I am, *there* you may be also. And you know the way where I am going.” Thomas said to Him, “Lord, we do not know where You are going, how do we know the way?” Jesus said to him, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me.

(John 14:1-6)

Funeral Sermon

Dear mourners

Among the most personable features of Mauno Koivisto were his great big hands. May I venture to say that numerous Finns noticed his sizable palms and fingers. Mauno Koivisto left deep handprints in the centennial history of independent Finland.

The hands of Mauno Koivisto were hands of peace. Even when his country had to be defended by war, he wanted to work for a conciliatory future. Amidst the great group of unknown soldiers, Mauno Koivisto was a well-known soldier, an exemplary war veteran.

As recent as this year, when his volleyball friends paid him a visit, the President reminisced over an incident in the Törnå Unit [later name: Larry Thorne]. Two Russian prisoners had been captured. Mauno Koivisto was assigned to escort them to the rear. As the prisoners and their escort moved from the front lines toward the rear, they met Finnish soldiers who, according to Mauno Koivisto,

started “banging the prisoners around”. He became angry with his countrymen, raised his hand and said: “Don't touch these men. They are my prisoners; they are my brothers.”

When peace finally dawned, Mauno Koivisto's hands were put to new assignments. The reconstruction of the country began. This man who was working in the harbour wanted to have a further education. With his hands he turned the pages of textbooks, studied, and deepened his learning. Under the pen name “Timberman”, he wrote newspaper articles, taking part in the improvement of just working conditions. The timberman's hands became those of an influential person and a PhD. The work of his hands and of his thoughts served in continuous interaction. Later on, in Tähtelä (the family's personal summer place) and Kultaranta (the presidential summer residence), he could be seen turning over “every stone and rock” while pondering on the condition of the world.

Nearly seventy years ago, in Mauno Koivisto's life a new and important chapter opened when he took Miss Tellervo Kankaanranta's hand and put a ring on his wife's finger. Deep affection, mutual commitment and respectful love accented their life, as was stated: for better, for worse – and today we know: till death them parted. The spouses were the most important people in the world to one another. Their union may have served as a model for many Finnish marriages. Their love was of the type found in everyday use, appreciative, spiced with humour, not pretentious.

In the Koivisto family history, the hands of the father received a new assignment when the hoped-for and loved daughter Assi was born. Unlike what was generally done in those days, this father got up at night to be the first to take care of his daughter, lifting her in his firm and secure hands. The photos taken of the father and his young daughter speak volumes to us.

Mauno Koivisto grew interested in sailing during his presidential years. On the boat, one hand had to take care of the sails, and have a knowledge of when to loosen, when to tighten the ropes. The other hand had to be kept tightly on the wheel.

Were these sailing skills also characteristic of the way Mauno Koivisto took care of his nation? One had to know when to loosen, when again to tighten those ropes. The captain did not reveal all his plans to the passengers on the ship. But afterwards his handprints, responsibly planned and executed, were clearly visible. Those big hands had firmly gripped the wheel of the good ship Finland.

With his hands Mauno Koivisto managed all kinds of “arm wrestling”. In volleyball, the tall man mastered his right-hand serves and net play. Part and parcel of the philosophy of both the game of volleyball and of politics is to observe the other players, to respect them, but also to strive to anticipate their next moves.

Mauno Koivisto was rapid in his formal handshakes. At times the President's hand seemed to guide those lining up to greet him to move on quickly. But if there was a person in need of support or encouragement, the father of the nation was in no hurry. The touch of his hand was full of encouragement: “It will be all right.”

Dear mourners, Mauno Koivisto knew from his youth onwards that everything in life is not in human hands. With the resources available, we certainly need to do all we can. We must not avoid responsibility and duty. Yet there comes a limit beyond which our human possibilities run out.

For Mauno Koivisto, taking care of responsibilities meant work, effort, even sacrifice. Yet at the same time, he hoped and believed that there was a world of mercy, a realm of absolute forgiveness. Obeying orders is our human duty, but in the final analysis we can only trust in the grace of God. Mauno Koivisto guided us pastors, too, to remember that words of mercy were more important than words about values.

Mauno Koivisto's style of speaking and writing was characterised by his desire to avoid superlatives. Overstated expressions had to be deleted from his texts. If ordinary words were not enough, extra emphases would not achieve any better results.

In describing his own inner world, Mauno Koivisto avoided hyperbole and unnecessary highlighting. He seldom spoke of his personal faith, and even then in few words. But hymns and hymn singing offered the former YMCA choirman opportunities. With his aide-de-camp in the backseat of the car, or when friends from the "Bigshots' Volleyball Team" visited him in hospital, hymns were sung. And he always had a hymn suggestion ready.

Even this year, when his good friends paid him a visit and asked what hymns should be sung, the reply was quick: "Nearer, My God, to Thee, Nearer to Thee...", that is, the so-called Titanic hymn. When his friends started singing in too low a key, the President interrupted the singing and transposed the key upwards. In his respect for traditions, Mauno Koivisto took it for granted that the hymn was sung with those lyrics he had learned in his youth, which is the form we will use at the end of this service.

It is not for us to wonder what moves in the innermost heart of our neighbour. Only God knows the inner being. Mauno Koivisto found it important to hold on to the mysteriousness of life, but also to grasp a better future. He often said, "If we do not know for sure what will happen, let us assume that all will go well."

Dear mourners. This funeral service is not merely about Mauno Koivisto's hands but ultimately about God's hands. God's hands are stronger than the strongest human hands. When our own hands grow tired and give way, we take refuge in the Eternal Arms.

This is what we already did in the opening hymn (Hymn 600) where we sang: "We submit our lives to the hands of the Father. He Himself prepares peace for us." This is what the boys' choir also sang in the hymn titled the "Finnish Prayer" (Hymn 584): "Bless and protect us, O Highest One, with Your hand."

Now, too, a man with strong hands can depart on his final earthly journey in the security of the old prayer: "Into your hands I entrust my spirit. Lord, you redeem me to freedom, you faithful God."

Words of Committal

Let us rise.

Believing in the resurrection of Jesus Christ, we commit Mauno Koivisto to the Lord.

Mauno Henrik Koivisto,
dust you are,

to dust you will return.

Jesus Christ, our Saviour, will raise you from the dead on the last day.

Choir: “Veteraanin iltahuuto” [The veteran's evening call]

Prayer

God, our Father. Give Mauno Koivisto Your eternal peace for the sake of Your dear Son Jesus Christ. May Your eternal light shine upon him. Be merciful to him and grant him eternal life. Faithful Lord and Saviour, You have redeemed him with Your holy and precious blood. Carry him into God's glory and into the company of Your saints, for the sake of Your name. And have mercy on us and lead us through this life; so that our journey would end well, and we would be included in the resurrection of the righteous. We plead this because of Your love.

The Lord's Prayer (unison)

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name, Your kingdom come, Your will be done, on earth as in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us. Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are Yours now and for ever. Amen.

The Benediction

The Lord bless you and keep you.

The Lord make His face shine upon you and be gracious unto you.

The Lord lift up His countenance upon you and give you peace.

In the name of the Father + and Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

Hymn 396 (the older lyrics) from the *Finnish Hymnal*

Eulogy, Sauli Niinistö, President of the Republic of Finland

Choir, Jean Sibelius: “Finlandia”

Concluding music: “Narvan marssi” [The Narva March]