

**Speech by Father Julius Sasnauskas,
Franciscan monk and Soviet dissident,
at the sitting of the Seimas of the Republic of Lithuania
dedicated to the 30th anniversary of 13 January 1991
and the Freedom Prize 2021 award ceremony**

Everything seemed to have reached the highest possible level that night. Prayer, faith, love for one's neighbour, courage, unity, wisdom, and the truth itself – all went up to the very top of Heaven and down to the very bottom of the soul attaining the widest reach possible. This can happen only once in a lifetime. Where did it all come from? From what machine of wonders? Nobody will guess. Of course, we were not on our own that night. We were not left alone against the tanks, however inspired, determined, and thirsty for freedom we were then. This would not have sufficed to stand bare-handed against the tanks. Today, when thanking all the freedom defenders, especially those who have sacrificed their lives, we also send our thanks to Heaven high above. I remember how, at this very building in the square well after midnight, Prof. Vytautas Landsbergis was repeatedly begging, through the loudspeakers, the people, at least women and children, who also were present here, to leave the place to avoid risk. The news had already come about the happenings at the TV Tower, the victims and injuries, and the tanks that might appear there at any moment. However, the crowd stood unmovable. The life and the freedom were so beautiful that no one wanted to cede the ground. Only some foreign correspondents with a camera seemed to be trying to spot a route for escape. They would take a look around from time to time but would not flee and eventually stay with those standing firm.

A woman came clutching St. Mary's sculpture in her arms. The crowd loudly gasped as if the Holy Virgin herself had suddenly descended from Heaven down to the packed dirty snow. We were really not alone. The rosary prayer was coming from the loudspeakers. 'The darkness of Good Friday did not last forever,' spoke Father Algimantas Keina. Someone interrupted him at the microphone to report

the latest news. Then, after a while, his words came again: 'The darkness of Good Friday did not last forever.' I lost the count of how many times. Years later, I asked the Father about his feelings that night. He admitted the fear was making him tremble all over as if it was really Good Friday. He stayed, however.

It is very fitting that the Chamber of the Seimas is empty today. If it were full, we would think that the events unfolded the way they did only to allow our politicians, top officials and guests to gather together in this room. It is vacant now. And the realisation comes that that January night brought a dramatic change, that it represented a moment of absolute truth and certainty. That was the night of birth. That was the moment that was to stay with us forever. This moment, which has already produced a new generation of children of freedom, will lead to ever new rebirth, ever new generation, everlasting discourse on everything and for everybody, and millions of good news even now when times are difficult. Things would have never turned out for us as they are today, if it was not for that January night. The machines of wonders are not turned on for nothing, are they?
