



Blue Mass Homily
offered for those who serve their community in protective services

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Bishop of Sioux Falls

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Memorial Feast of Saints Michael, Gabriel, & Raphael, Archangels

Cathedral of Saint Joseph

Today we gather in what has traditionally been called the Blue Mass to honor and pray in thanksgiving for all those, Catholic or not, who protect us and serve us in law enforcement and public safety professions, paid and volunteer, and their support staffs. They include first responders in emergencies and those who day-in and day-out, with vigilance, protect society and each of us and, when necessary, respond with action in times of special need.

We do so on the Feast of the Archangels, messengers of God, and appropriately so. Among other gifts, St. Michael is the Archangel of protection. Saint Gabriel is the Archangel who brings the message of God's love and mercy. And St. Raphael is the Archangel of healing. They do so not on their own spiritual merits but as God's instruments. Protection, mercy and healing are all part of the fabric of the role those we remember and pray for today, especially when under great pressure.

Catholic social teaching calls us to seek the common good. One Church document notes that "The common good implies that men and women can live in society with freedom, peace and security. To do so requires that the individual and smaller social unit, (like the family) are protected and promoted by the stronger power of state institutions." (YouCat)

That is the role all in public safety professions assume; some at the federal level, some at the state level, some at the county and municipal levels. Sadly, too often we take for granted their courage, their heroism, their sacrifice and that of their families who worry about them.

When tragedies caused by the violence of people or the violence of nature we rightly watch with awe the work of police, firefighters, EMTs, and others who respond immediately and with valor to these harsh happenings. They should also be noticed, appreciated and prayed for every day as they do their duty every day. We pray for their safety.

I think of the corrections officers who not only monitor prison or jail life to protect society and prisoner alike, but also encourage especially the young to prepare to begin anew.

I think of the probation officer who not only assures a sentence is complied with but also befriends and gives hope to those placed in his or her care.

I think of the police officer who patrols around this Cathedral neighborhood and all neighborhoods and reaches out to youth by presence and by word before trouble begins and sensitively responds to it when it does.

I think of those who must tell a mom or dad that an accident has occurred and their child no longer is alive.

I think of the trooper along the Interstate who by diligence in enforcing the law prevents accidents.

I think of EMT's who arrive in minutes and must make quick decisions when minutes can be the difference between life and death.

I think of the fire fighters who seek to save people and buildings and to contain the spread of such destructive forces.

I think of the officers who lead funeral processions so that the grieving may say goodbye with respect and dignity.

I think of all who must put up with false alarms, inhospitable welcomes, and the danger of violence lurking in the unknown they enter into, and yet do so with professionalism and courtesy.

The list could go on...

In recent days with hurricanes and earthquakes, random violence, gangs and addictive drugs, we have seen powerful witness to the good all who we are praying for today do. One of the most moving recent moments for me was when those who seek to protect and to help and heal announced with great sadness that, given the danger and the impassability due to destruction of the hurricane, they could not respond to cries of help, though they wanted to, until the worst had passed. We also note those who go beyond the call of duty to dig out persons trapped under debris or with great effort provide basic necessities that sustain life.

I was in St. Louis a few weeks ago when those we remember today sought to protect the right of peaceful protest and to protect from those who sought to disrupt peace expression.

I think of those who personally lived out the message of Jesus Christ that there is no greater love than to lay down one's life for ones friends. We pray for the known and unknown, who have been injured or paid the ultimate price while simply doing their duty, a duty that is essential for the stability of society. St. Francis de Sales once said, "We should strive to keep our hearts open to the sufferings . . . of other people, and pray continually that God may grant us that spirit of compassion which is truly the spirit of God." Those we pray for are asked to do so every day.

An Iraq war veteran offered a moving and powerful tribute to those we honor and remember. He said that as dangerous and difficult as was the soldier's duty in Iraq; he knew that he would be in harm's way only for a period of time and then come home. Those we remember today he noted are in harm's way every day, all the time.

There is an old saying, "without hope the heart would break." You in law enforcement and public safety in its many manifestations by your presence, your courage, your compassion and your call to duty come what may are messengers of hope as Christ calls all of us to be. Thank you for who you are and what you do. May Our Lady of Hope watch over and bless you, your staffs and your families.

May the Archangels of protection, mercy and healing intercede for you, for all you serve, and for our country.