

September 11, 2021
Blue Mass honoring First Responders
Homily by Deacon Bob Stauffer



I was at the gym early this morning with two of my good friends who are also retired state troopers. We were talking back and forth and one of them said, “What a beautiful day.” I remembered at that moment, that was what I said to myself as I was getting ready to go on patrol that morning 20 years ago today.

If I were to ask any of you here today what you remember most about what happened 20 years ago, it would probably be what happened on September 11th, 2001. Unless there was another important personal life event for you like a graduation, a wedding, a new child, a new job, or the loss of a loved

one, this is a day in history that we all know very well. This was a day filled with heroes. This was a day when all law enforcement members, firefighters, emergency medical providers, and military personnel were aching to do something to help, and praying that everything they saw on television wasn’t as bad as it looked. What we saw was service and sacrifice at its very finest. An example to model our own lives and careers after.

September 11th, 2001 is a day that will always be remembered. It was a day that all of America and most of the world stopped and watched as two planes were flown into the sides of the Twin Towers in New York city. Another plane flew into the pentagon and the one that we are most familiar with, was forced to crash into a field in Shanksville, Somerset County, by 40 of the bravest souls to ever walk this earth. Thousands of civilians, police officers, firemen, and emergency medical providers lost their lives that day. Still more have lost their lives since then because of the hazardous materials they came in contact with at those crash sites.

In one of the most horrific times in American history, the world saw America at its best, when evil’s one desire was to bring this great nation to

its knees by filling the hearts of all its citizens with fear and heartache. America became unified in this awful moment, coast to coast and border to border. It didn't matter what state or city you lived in, or what political party you supported, or what your race or religious beliefs were. The only thing that mattered was that we stood together against the terrorism and terrorists that hated all of us because we live in this great nation. Perhaps the best thing of all, was that people flocked to Church. One of the things that has also stuck with me, is that for three days after these attacks, there was not one criminal incident that we had to respond to. The phones hardly rang at the barracks. But, as we all know, evil does not stop trying to fulfill its mission and it crept back into the hearts of the weak willed.

Do you ever think about why young children often imagine themselves as being "bigger-than-life" heroes? It could very well be due to the uniforms, the prestige, or the danger associated with becoming a police officer, firefighter, or emergency medical provider. These are likely explanations, yet, at the same time, they seem to reflect the more superficial elements of these professions.

There is something that is much deeper than these elements, something perhaps intangible and still very real. There were deeper, indescribable, yet genuine and exceptional elements that arose in everybody who took action to help another person in need 20 years ago today. Everyday people who put themselves in harm's way for the good of other everyday people. Everyday people who were not only fellow Americans, but fellow children of God. Those deeper, very exceptional elements are what make your respective professions so noble and so enduring. They reflect the human qualities demanded of you day in and day out. Such qualities have been respected and admired for centuries.

This great outpouring of self in total surrender for the good of others is reflected in all of you gathered here today. You exemplify these qualities in your public duties. And this is why, I believe little children look up to you; it is because beneath the uniform they see in you the awesome responsibilities to protect, to give of your selves in public service, to give aid, and comfort the afflicted who you encounter in your work.

God gives you Divine Grace in order that you might bear witness to God's love and mercy through protecting the weak, giving of yourself to others, and comforting the suffering. You have been given a mission,

and although many times it may involve you facing the broken and sinful sides of humanity, you are called to protect, to give of yourselves, and to offer care and comfort to everyone. In this great mission of service, you unite your giving and your service to something bigger than yourself, and your job truly becomes a vocation.

To give of yourself for others is central to Jesus' message in the Gospel reading today. We heard Jesus tell us the ways in which we can imitate him by the total emptying of ourselves for others. This great outpouring of self is reflected in those who imitate Jesus in their striving for justice in society, and that is certainly what you are called to do. Justice is more than merely restoring order, it is contributing to something better, to the building up of the kingdom of God here on earth by serving as a protector, as a generous giver of self, and as a comforting presence. The ones who do justice will live in the presence of the Lord.

As we come together today, we commend you as peacemakers, as ambassadors of justice, and as brothers and sisters in Christ. We ask God to bless all of you who wear the uniform in service to your country, state, city and community. I also want to ask a special blessing upon your families today, because it's your spouses, children, and parents who pray for your safety while you are at work, and who love and support you and can't wait for you to come home.

Finally, let us remember all those who have fallen in the line of duty, who never failed in their generous service, even when it meant the giving of their very lives. Let us give thanks to God for the witness they left us, a witness of sacrifice, and a witness to the dignity and honor of your vocation of service.

May the angels of God surround you and protect you. And when the time comes, may they lead you to the Son of Man sitting upon his glorious throne, where you will hear Him say, "Come, you who are blessed by my Father. Inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world."