

I wonder how many of you, when you were little, imagined yourself becoming a police officer, a firefighter, or an Emergency Medical Technician? I know I did.

It could have been due to the uniforms that you wear, the prestige, or perhaps it was the danger associated with these professions. These are certainly likely explanations, and yet, at the same time, they seem to reflect the more *superficial* elements of those professions.

On the other hand, I think that little children imagine themselves to be these '*heroes*' because they sense there is something that seems much *deeper* than these elements, something perhaps intangible, yet *very real*.

Those deeper, *real 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.

Qualities that have been respected and admired for centuries. This outpouring of yourself in total surrender for the good of others is reflected in all of you who have gathered here with us today.

You exemplify these qualities in your public duties.

And so this is why, I believe, that so many people, young *and old*, look up to you; it is because beneath the uniform that you wear, they see in you the *awesome* responsibilities that you have accepted to protect, to give of your selves in public service, and to comfort the afflicted whom you encounter in your work.

Your honorable profession has been recognized by the Catholic Church in the annual 'Blue Mass', for eighty years.

The first was held in Washington D.C. at Saint Patrick's Catholic Church back in 1934.

A priest by the name of Tom Dade, had the idea of acknowledging police and firemen in a celebration of the mass, what we Catholics call the "Eucharist" because he recognized that beneath the authority of the uniform lay a person who has accepted a call, an often dangerous call, to serve the public.

The word Eucharist, incidentally, is translated from the Greek "eukaristos," which means "grateful". How fitting, because grateful we are for each one of you and what *you do* for us.

It has been said that it is a thin blue line that protects us from barbarity; it is a thin blue line that defends our communities, so that they remain just that, *communities* and *not* places of fear.

We have you brave men and women, to thank for that.

Too often, I think we can become *complacent*, and forget just how fragile the world we live in *is*.

On the other hand, that we can *become* so complacent is perhaps a *tribute* to you and for your *effectiveness*. You do your jobs *so well*, we often simply take you for granted.

We ought not to . . .

That is why we come together this morning, as a faith community, to extend our *sincerest appreciation* for you.

Your selfless devotion and sacrifice for others underlines the very teaching of Jesus, who teaches us the ways in which we can imitate him by the total emptying of *ourselves*, for the sake of others.

Today's reading from the Letter of Paul to the Corinthians underscores this as he writes, "Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ."

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.

Now justice is more than merely restoring order, it is contributing to something better, serving as a protector, as a generous giver of self, and *also* as a comforting presence in our community, much as Jesus was, when in today's Gospel, we hear of how he comforted the suffering man.

And so as we come together today, our parish community commends you as peacemakers, as ambassadors of justice, and as our brothers and sisters in Christ.

We ask God to bless all of you who wear the uniform in service to our communities.

We also offer our prayers for your families today, because it's your spouses, children, and parents who every day pray for your safety while you are at work, and who love and support you at the end of the shift, when your duty is done.

Finally,
let us remember all of 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.

We offer thanksgiving to God for the witness they have left us, a witness of the ultimate sacrifice, and a witness to the dignity and the honor of their vocation of service.

May the angels of God surround you, protect you, day in and day out, as you place yourselves in harm's way.

And may they remind you of your great call to become *angels*

for all those you serve.