

September 17, 2016

Blue and White Mass – Cathedral of the Blessed Sacrament.

Good evening everyone. Thank you all for coming. It is an honor for me to be asked to celebrate this annual Blue and White Mass.

I want to thank all those who have arranged and are participating in this celebration, including

- The readers, servers, choir, and musicians at this Mass
- And the Knights of Columbus, who have prepared a reception for our honored guests

And speaking of our honored guests, they are the women and men in blue and white. I want to enumerate the various types of service to our communities and our nation that are represented.

As I identify them, I ask that they would stand and remain standing until all the groups are identified.

And since this Blue and White Mass is a day of remembrance, especially in remembrance of those who suffered and died in the tragic events of that fateful September 11th, if you are retired from service, or if you are a family member of one who served in the past and is no longer with us, I ask you to stand as well.

- Police officers and all who serve in law enforcement; local, state, and federal
- Fire fighters, ambulance drivers, EMT's, and all emergency responders in our communities
- All medical personnel in our hospitals, emergency rooms, and clinics, who bind up the wounds of the injured and care for the dying
- Those who guard and defend our country in the military, including our veterans
- For all elected officials in legislative, executive, or legislative branches of government; who are responsible for enacting, administering, and deciding courses of action based on the principles of freedom and justice that we cherish in our country

Please join me in showing our appreciation for all of these servants of the common good. (Applause.) Please be seated.

God bless all of you.

Those of you who know me, you know that I like to share a story as an illustration of something that our Lord is trying to say to us from the Sacred Scriptures that we just heard as part of our liturgy.

Before I get to a story, I want to highlight the first few lines from the second reading; the 1st Letter of St. Paul to Timothy.

Beloved:

I ask that supplications, prayers, petitions, and thanksgivings be offered for everyone, for kings and for all in authority, that we may lead a quiet and tranquil life in all devotion and dignity.

Those words are so appropriate for the purpose of this Blue and White Mass. We are here most especially to offer prayers and thanksgivings for all in authority.

Our thanksgiving to them was expressed in their standing to be recognized and in our applause.

Shortly after this homily, we will offer special prayers for them.

What really catches my attention in the words of St. Paul is something that applies to the women and men in Blue and White whom we honor today; and it is something that applies to all of us who are the beneficiaries of their dedicated service.

St. Paul tells us the real reason why we should gather in prayer during this Blue and White Mass. He says the reason is so that that we may lead a quiet and tranquil life in all devotion and dignity.

All of us want a quiet and tranquil life. No one wants to live in fear or under threat of danger from an enemy or oppressor, or even the danger that comes from lack of due diligence or an unforeseen accident.

We all desire peace; not just the absence of terrorism, violence, or war; but peace in the sense that each one of us as individuals, and as families, communities, and even as a nation, we can live in an environment in which peace is promoted through a proactive care for the places in which we live and where we care for each other.

The bottom line in living that way of peace is measured by the way that we care for those who are poor; who are lacking in the basic things of life such as food, shelter, health, and education; and those who are neglected or mistreated.

St. Paul says that the key to living a quiet and tranquil life is something that we must pursue in all devotion and dignity.

Both of those words have religious and secular connotations.

- There is devotion to country and devotion to God
- There is dignity that applies to people who earned it because of the uniform they wear and the service that it represents;
- and there is the fundamental dignity that is part of the nature of every human person regardless of race, religion, gender, ethnic origin, political affiliation, or social status
- every human person is made in the image and likeness of God

That last one is implicit in the words of St. Paul who says that when we gather in prayer and thanks as we do in this Blue and White Mass, it is good and pleasing to God our savior, who wills everyone to be saved. Everyone; for we are all made in the image and likeness of God.

And St. Paul says that we do what we do with devotion and dignity has a further purpose which is to come to the knowledge of the truth.

Before I get to the punchline; before I get to what St. Paul reminds us is the object of that knowledge of the truth, I want to share a story.

It's a story repeated last week when our whole nation was observing the infamous day we all know as 9/11.

It's the story of two men who were total strangers who arrived at the World Trade Center, and who worked together in the search and rescue of the few survivors at Ground Zero.

One is David Karnes, who served 23 years in the U.S. Marine Corps and the other is Jason Thomas who was also a Marine Corps veteran.

When they each heard the news about the terrorist attack and the stress that it put on the emergency services in the City of New York; each one put on Marine Corps fatigue uniform; grabbed some basic equipment and drove as close as they could get to that site.

Staff Sargent Karnes drove from his office in Connecticut and Sargent Thomas was a native New Yorker. They met for the first time at Ground Zero.

They were responsible for the rescue of two New York Port Authority police officers, Will Jimeno and John McLoughlin, who were buried in the center of the World Trade Center ruins, 20 feet below the surface.

It was a case of rescuers rescuing rescuers.

When Jimeno and McLoughlin were brought to safety, Jason Thomas quietly left the scene to return to his family. He eventually moved to Columbus, Ohio.

David Karnes was interviewed by the media and he regretted that he did not know Jason Thomas' full name. No one heard from Jason Thomas until the 5th anniversary of 9/11.

Neither of them went to Ground Zero to be heroes. Neither of them thought of himself as Superman.

What impresses me about their story is what they said. It is what St. Paul is talking about in his 1st Letter to Timothy.

David Karnes, who openly acknowledged that he is a devout Christian said, “It was my duty to help.” So he grabbed his equipment, stopped at his church to ask his pastor for a blessing, and went to New York that day.

And as David Karnes starting digging through the rubble, he kept shouting, “Is there anyone down there?”

Jason Thomas said, “Someone needed help. It didn’t matter who. I didn’t even have a plan. But I have all this training as a Marine, and all I could think was, ‘My city is in need.’”

I already mentioned that St. Paul tells us that God who wills everyone to be saved, is the one God, who sent his Son Jesus Christ as mediator between God and men.

And St. Paul says that man Jesus Christ gave himself as ransom for all.

So when you try to look into the mind and heart of people like David Karnes and Jason Thomas, or the men and women in uniforms of Blue and White and other colors of service who are present here, don’t be surprised, but do be amazed, that there are among us men and women who understand words like:

- It was my duty to help.
- Someone needed help. It didn’t matter who.
- My city is in need.

Those are words of devotion and words of dignity.

And we are reminded that the ultimate source of such devotion and dignity in regard to self, God, and others, is the Lord Jesus who gave himself as a ransom for all.

It is the mystery of salvation in Christ that we celebrate here. When we come to this altar we do not simply remember the person of Jesus Christ.

We encounter him. He is present here because he hears our prayers and supplication and our thanksgiving. He comes in search of us who are in search of real peace and tranquility.

The Lord Jesus comes to us shouting, "Is there anyone down there?" Those are awesome words of love and mercy.

We are thankful for those who keep the peace and those who respond to our needs when tranquility has been disturbed.

We know that you are there because of your sense of duty.
We know that you are aware that our community needs you.
We know that it doesn't matter to you who needs your help.

We thank God for you.
We pray for you.
And we bless you.