

Thankful for the Unsung Heroes in Blue

In this week's Gospel from John 10, we hear of the good shepherd who "lays down his life for his sheep" and of the desire of Jesus that there be "one flock, one shepherd." And as I was reading it, the thought occurred to me of how much law enforcement has with this teaching of Jesus.

Every day, our law enforcement officers go out into the community, and face incredibly dangerous situations. When someone asks for help, they do not ask are you a Republican or Democrat, are you white or black, or if your house is of a certain income value. They serve the "one flock" of our communities: both those who love them, and those who protest against them or complain about them. To serve and protect, this is what they do.

Thus far in 2021 alone, consider the following. In our country, 7 police officers died of vehicular assault; 6 were struck by a vehicle; 2 were killed by stabbing; one died in a motorcycle crash; 16 died due to gunfire; 7 died in an automobile crash and 4 died by being assaulted. And we are just now coming up on the end of April. Could you name any of them? I couldn't until I looked up the statistics with the faces and the names listed. Were there any protests or demonstrations that you saw in the media for them? Did you hear of any complaining or quitting because of the negativity in the media directed at them, or the hate that some express towards them?

As we are all aware, the past week has seen protests at the Brooklyn Center police department. Based on the early facts, an officer mistakingly grabbed her gun and thought it was a taser. It was a horrible, tragic mistake, and my heart goes out to the officer Kim Potter and to the young man who lost his life, Daunte Wright. I pray for them both.

However, consider that for a number of days, protestors have gathered; some have gotten violent and damaged businesses. Some carried signs expressing hate for the police; there was even a pigs head on display. How would you like to go into work in that environment? Yet officers did. Consider the mayor of Brooklyn Center, Mike Elliot, who promptly, with the city council, fired the city manager, Curt Boganey, who simply called for "due process." The kicker to me was a member of the city council, Kris Lawrence-Anderson, said she voted to fire him because she "didn't want repercussions at a personal level." Think about this. Sound familiar? I thought of Matthew 27:24: *"When Pilate saw that he was not succeeding at all but that a riot was breaking out, he took water and washed his hands in the sight of the crowd saying I am innocent of this mans blood. Look to it yourselves."* I see a lot of "Pilates" out there these days - politicians, people online and media who are quick to vilify rather than support the men and women of law enforcement. There is something seriously wrong when we are considering "cancelling" a member of the "Paw Patrol" because the dog is a cop, or take "Cops" off the air after many years simply because some do not like the police.

I truly believe most people are angry at what is going on towards our police in this country. I truly believe most people just simply want a safe community; to know they can drive to work and no one will block a freeway; to know they can call on someone in times of need and they will come without hesitation if there is an intruder or medical emergency; to know that the streets are being patrolled to ensure safety for all and they can go out biking with the kids or up to the local park in peace.

The problem some have is we forget the effects of original sin. It is a fallacy to think you can weed out all racism, sexism and bad people. Racism will always be a part of our world. And it crosses races. In a favorite movie that talks about racism, "In the Heat of the Night," Sidney Poitier plays Det. Virgil Tibbs; Rod Steiger (who won the Oscar) plays Chief Bill Gillespie and Larry Gates plays Eric Endicott, a plantation owner. A murder takes place in a small town; a businessman building a factory is killed. Detective "they call me Mister" Tibbs is visiting his mother, waiting to leave town at the train station when picked up by a racist deputy who assumes he's the killer. The chief learns quickly he's not. But finding that Tibbs is a detective in Philadelphia who specializes in homicide, he convinces him to stay (with some prodding from Tibbs' chief). Mr. Endicott, who is a wealthy white man who is overtly racist, who owns a plantation, and opposed the factory being built, Tibbs suspects is the killer but he's blinded by passion and his racism too. In an argument Det. Tibbs has in Endicott's greenhouse he slaps him (I believe this was improvised by Poitier) when insulted, and he tells the chief as he's leaving to get in the car that he just needs 2 days to "nail him to the wall." Chief Gillespie then says "oh boy, man you're just like the rest of us!" It's a very powerful scene that reminds us in all of us can be the effects of sin. You might consider watching the movie again (or for the first time if you haven't seen it) because it's message on race issues is timeless.

Where there is racism, we must be aware of it. We should look at ourselves too and ask ourselves if there are elements of it in our hearts, and ask God to help it go away if we see it. But I truly believe by in large people of all races are good people who support one another. I believe we've made great strides as a society since the Civil Rights movement. This is the Holy Spirit at work helping people to see evil. Sadly people of all races can learn racism too from what they learn from their parents or other family members and friends. We need to do all we can to combat it.

With respect to the police, what amazes me with them is how Christ-like so many are. Those very people who are out protesting in front of the police department, if someone had a medical emergency or someone committed a violent act against someone in the group, I have no doubt an officer would respond to render assistance. They go out knowing they face danger. We must also remember they are human beings. In a split second, an officer has to determine is their life in danger. They may make a tragic mistake and see a toy gun and think it's a real gun, or misjudge a situation. To expect the police to eliminate all potential for human error is insanity.

I hope and pray we see less "Pilates" who might be quick to score political points off of the police, and not have the fortitude to say most police are doing great work for our

communities, let's support them, and we also see more people simply saying "thank you." These officers deal with so much, from the routine traffic stop that can go awry or the angry motorist who gets pulled over for speeding when the officer doesn't make up the rules but is tasked with enforcing them by the city, to unknown domestic situations where passions are high and weapons are in the house to comforting a child who has been abused. Truly, where would we be without these folks? They deserve our praise and prayers.

As things hopefully return to more normalcy, I'm hopeful down the road to have a "Blue Mass" at Saint Joe's, offered for members of law enforcement, and also perhaps some type of community event where we could have a BBQ or cookout or something for our local police officers. I think it would be a great way to simply show some support.

Please join me in saying a prayer for the members of our law enforcement community, and also their families, who have been on such an edge in recent years and especially locally this past week. If you see an officer, consider saying "thank you." I'm so thankful our local department routinely patrols past our parish, and also came out quickly a few years ago when an emotionally disturbed person came into the church one summer day and needed some help which they officers got for the young man. These heroes in blue do not do what they do for recognition or praise; rather it's because they feel a calling to serve our communities. May God watch over them, but may we as citizens also offer up some thanks and be the voice that shines the light on the good that so many of our officers do.

God's blessings to you,

Fr. Paul