

26th Sunday in Ordinary Time

As kids, we were fascinated with the few mementos my father had from his time in the army during World War II: a brown blanket to cover his cot, a canteen for carrying water, a Japanese flag and kimono as souvenirs at the end of his service, and his rifle, which he kept way out of reach of all of us. We were children. We did not fully understand that these items represented years of sacrifice and danger. We thought of them like toys. Only in later years, as I learned more about the perils of war and the atrocities committed against prisoners of war, did I start to grasp what must have been going through my father's head when he put on his uniform every morning. But he did it out of love for his country and a desire to make the world a better place. Somehow those ideals meant more to him than the dangers he faced every day.

Here in our community, police officers, firefighters and emergency responders also put on a uniform every day. I'm sure I do not fully grasp what goes through their heads, but I can tell that they share similar ideals. They want to protect our neighborhood, and they do it because of a principle that we Christians hold dear: love of neighbor. Jesus himself said there is no greater love than to lay down your life for a friend. These heroes put their lives at risk even for people they do not know, people they may not agree with, people who sometimes don't like them, people who, just because they are people, get equal protection.

Tomorrow we celebrate our third annual blue mass at St. Anthony Catholic Church in order to honor those who protect our community and to thank them for their service.

When people asked Mother Teresa of Kolkata what she thought when people called her a saint, she said her greatest concern was that people would think that sainthood was for others, not for them. Sainthood, she believed, is for everyone.

Those who commit their lives to public service probably feel a similar way. Just because they love and care for all the people of this community does not mean that we should not. They rely on our help to report crime, to live safely, and to take care of our health.

St. Paul made a similar appeal to Timothy. Timothy had taken over some leadership in the spiritual community, and Paul explained what he should be ready to do: "pursue righteousness, devotion, faith, love, patience, and gentleness." Then he compared Timothy's responsibilities to those of an athlete: "Compete well for the faith." Timothy surely took Paul's advice. But the church puts this reading before us this weekend with hopes that we take his advice too. We should all "pursue righteousness, devotion, faith, love, patience, and gentleness." You already do this in your families and friends, and our public servants demonstrate these virtues as well. Life calls us to pursue elevated goals: not personal happiness, but righteousness and love. When we do that we are all public servants of the community, and we give "honor and eternal power" to Christ.