

# **Archbishop Lori's Homily: 26th Sunday in Ordinary Time; Blue Mass**

*26th Sunday Ordinary Time*

*Blue Mass*

*St. Casimir, Baltimore, MD*

*Sept. 30, 2018*

It is a true pleasure and an honor for me to celebrate this annual Blue Mass in which we honor and pray for the First Responders in our community - the Police, Firefighters, EMS personnel, and other services.

Mayor Pugh, what an honor it is to welcome you to this celebration together with the Acting Police Commissioner, Gary Tuggle, as well as the Baltimore Fire Chief, Dr. Niles Ford. Represented at today's Blue Mass are an array of Federal Law Enforcement Agencies, State of Maryland Defense, Law Enforcement, and Fire Fighting Agencies, many from the Baltimore City Police Department, Baltimore City Sheriff Department, the Baltimore City Fire Department, the Baltimore County Police & Fire Departments, various Volunteer Fire Departments, and the Baltimore City Paramedics, as well as EMS personnel from throughout the region. I recognize as well the Knights of Columbus, whom I'm privileged to serve as chaplain, and the Catholic War Veterans who did yeoman's work in organizing this event. The array of departments and agencies represented here gives us some idea of how many people devote themselves to our health and safety - and the health and safety of our fellow citizens! Let us show them our appreciation!

I'd also like to welcome in a special way a priest with whom I served for many years, Father Raymond Fecteau, Pastor of Our Lady of the Visitation Parish in Darnestown, and the Chaplain of the U.S. Secret Service. And, of course, Fr. Dennis Grumsey, the Pastor of this great parish of St. Casimir and the Chaplain of the Catholic War Veterans, together with my brother deacons. And thanks to all, parishioners and friends, who are taking part in this Mass, even those of you who forgot that today is

the annual Blue Mass and now are wondering how long all of this is going to take!

## **What Brings Us Together**

Surely we are here to honor and thank all those who strive to keep us safe and to pray for those who have made the ultimate sacrifice to do so. Later on, in the General Intercessions, with love and respect, we will recall the names of those who have fallen in the line of duty and together we will commend them to the living God. These are your colleagues and friends who gave their all for our community. We cannot repay the debt we owe them but we can commend them to the loving mercy of our heavenly Father. And we want to recognize the challenges each of you face on a daily basis. Some of you labor to secure justice across the breadth of our land, to investigate federal crimes, to keep our nation safe from treachery, to protect federal officials and ensure the soundness of our currency. Others of you labor to keep our streets and neighborhoods safe, to reduce violent crime, to help people in distress, to protect property, to shield the vulnerable, and to bring to justice those who harm others. You do this and so much more in difficult circumstances that often bring you face to face not only with human weakness and fragility but also with the capacity of human beings to inflict evil on others. Often that to which you respond is anything but a good news story... it is bad news...very bad news indeed. All of which means you and I stand in need of some good news – the insight and strength we receive from the Word of God and from the living presence of Jesus in the Eucharist.

## **What Does Scripture Say to Us Today?**

So when we turn to today's Scripture readings, what light does God's Word shed on these awesome responsibilities that are yours? How does God's Word encourage you not just in the week ahead, but for the long haul, the daily grind, that is often a mix of routine and danger? Let me suggest three messages you might take away from this Mass, three points that may serve as guiding lights in your daily service to our community.

First, the Lord urges you and me to be trustworthy in the service that we render to others. He tells us to root out of our lives anything that could lead others to wrongdoing, to be people of integrity, to be the people that we claim to be. Using graphic language, the Lord commands us to rid ourselves of corruption, to root it out

of our lives entirely. If any member of our body causes us to sin, he says, get rid of it. Imagining ourselves without a foot or a hand or an eye gives us some idea of how sin disfigures us and disfigures the communities we strive to serve. Yet, when we not only uphold the law and obey the law, when we also live by the spirit of the law in all our dealings, we become trustworthy brokers of justice, safety, and health. Integrity gives us a basic platform for building trust in the communities we serve. This is something we all struggle with, isn't it, and I would be remiss not to mention the struggles the Church is having due to the broken trust of some of its leaders, including more than a few bishops. Just as I must take the words of today's Gospel to heart, so too I urge you to take them to heart as well.

A second lesson pertains to values. What's really important to you? I'm going to guess that most of you got into your line of work not because you thought you'd bring home money in wheelbarrows but rather because you wanted to make the world a better place. The fact of the matter is that you make many sacrifices in order to serve others. At the same time, you love your families and you strive to provide for them but you also teach them that money isn't everything. Indeed, as you've seen so often, "the love of money is the root of all evil" (I Tim 6:10). St. James tells us the same thing in today's second reading where he condemns those who hoard riches, who treat laborers unfairly, and live in an entirely self-centered way ... fattening themselves up for the kill. Your daily work demonstrates for you the gap between rich and poor in our community but even more so, your service illustrates that service is more important than power and helping others is more important than riches. All I can say is, keep it up!

Then, there's a third point that applies to my line of work as well as yours, & it's this: We need all the help we can get ... we need everyone's participation and cooperation. To combat terrorism, for example, we're told, "If you see something, say something." We need people to take care of their health and to install smoke alarms. We need community groups to help keep our streets safe. And we need to be on the outlook for talent wherever we can find it so that we can do our difficult jobs better. I'm no different than you when it comes to this - the more participation and cooperation that exists in the Church the better it will be! And where do we find support for this idea in today's Scripture readings? Two places. First, there's the case of Eldad and Medad who must not have gotten the memo and, as a result, did

not show up at the tent where Moses imparted the spirit of prophecy to the seventy elders. But they prophesied anyway and some got upset - "who do they think they are?" But Moses was wise & so knew that the Lord had gifted Eldad & Medad with prophecy and so told Joshua to leave them alone- would that all the people were prophets, he said! Then, in the Gospel we meet a follower of Jesus who was not quite in the inner circle. The Apostle John reported to Jesus that this man was driving out demons and wondered if he should be stopped but Jesus told him not to do so. "Do not prevent him," Jesus said because 'whoever is not against us is for us.' If Jesus needed all the friends he could get to do his ministry, what about us? How important that we make all the friends we can in our communities!

## **Conclusion**

And when we come down to it, our various communities have no better friends than you! Thank you once again for your devoted service, and may God bless you, your colleagues, your families, all those you encounter in the line of duty, and may God bless us all and keep us in his love!