“He will give his angels charge over you to accompany and defend and preserve you in all your ways.”

Homily by Most Reverend John T. Folda, Bishop of Fargo

September 25, 2019

Blue Mass – Votive Mass of the Angels
St. Anthony’s Church, Fargo

It’s an honor for me to celebrate this Blue Mass with you today, and I want to thank Fr. Courtright for his invitation. As you know, we come together in this Mass to pray for and to honor those who are on the front lines working for public safety in our community—law enforcement officers, firefighters, first responders, and all those who work for public safety. You might know that this so-called Blue Mass is named for the blue color of the uniforms that police officers traditionally wore. No matter the color of your uniform, this Mass is offered for all of you!

To mark this event, we are celebrating a votive Mass of the angels. We read in the book of Psalms: “He will give his angels charge over you to accompany and defend and preserve you in all your ways.” In Catholic tradition, the guardian angels and archangels are considered special patrons of those who work for public safety, and you can be assured of their protection. The angels are those blessed spirits sent among us by God as his agents, his messengers, his servants. They are powerful, but their power isn’t their own; it comes from God. They are benevolent, seeking the good of God’s people, working his will among them. They guide us and protect us from danger. Sometimes they issue warnings, and make known to us God’s will. Can you see the parallels? My friends, you have a special place in our community working for the common good of us all. In so many ways, you are like the angels among us, protecting, rescuing, warning, and assuring the safety and well-being of us all.

The professions you have adopted are built on a whole array of Christian virtues. You selflessly accept the challenges, and yes the hardships, of serving others. Sometimes this takes you away from your own loved ones so that you can be there for those in trouble. Your work requires patience and forbearance when dealing with difficult situations and people. You must exercise restraint in the use of the power that is in your hands, knowing that that power is not your own. You need courage to do what is necessary, even when this might put you in harm’s way. You depend on a sense of justice, giving to each his due and carrying out your duties with integrity and honesty.

Sometimes you are called upon to respond to emergencies when people are in the greatest distress. You see our brothers and sisters in the most desperate situations, and with skill and authority you try to restore peace and dispel fear. You ensure safety and protect us from danger. You might even begin the healing that so many need simply by your presence and your calm. This all might sound nearly superhuman, but we know of course that we don’t carry out these duties alone. In faith, we know that we are instruments of God’s power and mercy and grace at work in the world.

The angels we spoke of earlier are beings of great power, but they know that their true glory is as servants of God. They don’t serve themselves, they carry out the will of the One who sends them. They serve those that our Lord puts in their care. In the same way, my friends, the greatness of your calling is found in this attitude of service. By putting yourself at the service of
others, you cooperate in this mission of the angels: to protect, to heal, to warn, to guide. God gives his grace to all of us to be of service to one another, but in a special way he gives this grace to you. Remember what our Lord told his disciples: Whoever would be great among you must be the servant of all.

Today we also remember those who have already been called from this life, and especially those who laid down their lives in this work of service. Theirs is a special kind of sacrifice, a sacrifice that echoes the words of Jesus: “There is no greater love than this, to lay down one’s life for one’s friends.” Just as Jesus laid down his life for us, you lay down your lives every day in the line of duty to ensure the health and well-being of others.

Dear friends, you have the admiration and the thanks of our entire community. We are grateful for your service, and we offer you our prayers. May our Lord continue to work through you as you serve our brothers and sisters in need, and may the angels be always with you to protect and guide you.