



Archdiocese of San Antonio
Most Rev. Gustavo García-Siller



Blue Mass September 29, 2014

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ, it is a privilege to celebrate this Blue Mass with all of you who work and sacrifice every day to protect and serve our grateful communities. We live in a culture and at a time when celebrities are recognized for sometimes less than noble actions. Today, however, we gather to honor you, our first responders, for the valued service you render that define words like commitment, sacrifice, and love.

We also come together today with you to pray. I know too often that your vocation calls you to see our community at moments of great personal tragedy and in the darkest consequences of evil committed by the fractured and the faithless. This morning we pray in thanksgiving for your commitment to more than an occupation, but a way of life. We also pray for a healing of the wounds that penetrate your souls and trouble your hearts.

In today's Gospel, Jesus encounters Nathanael. Just before they meet, St. John writes in the part of the gospel that we did not read this morning, that Nathanael voices a cynicism about Jesus and says "Can anything good come from Nazareth?" We are not told what robbed Nathanael of his optimism and acceptance, but he needed to be convinced. Jesus does not punish him for his skeptical reaction, instead He promises Nathanael that if he opens his heart to the possibilities of faith that he will see great things and the victory over evil he, as a "true child of Israel" had so long prayed for.

As "First Responders", sometimes your own idealism and dedication to the health and safety of those you serve is shaken by the enormity of the task and often the sadness of the moment. It is your faith that keeps you from the despair that can rob you of hope or shake your dedication. This morning we pray to honor your sacrifice, but we also pray to strengthen your faith. In faith, you need not be troubled nor afraid.

As many of you know, this past Pentecost I consecrated the people of the Archdiocese of San Antonio to the Holy Spirit. Now I encourage each of you to turn to our Advocate, the Holy Spirit, for his great gifts. Every day, the gift of **Fortitude** will make you steadfast in doing good in the performance of your daily duty. The gift of **Piety** will give you comfort in the most difficult times as it helps you to see God as a Father who loves you. When our faith is shaken, the gifts of **Understanding and Knowledge** help us to discover the richness and true power of faith, while the gift of **Counsel** can give you the spiritually motivated good sense to say and do the right thing when it is needed most. The Gift of **Wisdom** helps us to see others as God sees them, with a love that will strengthen your hope. Finally, **Fear of the Lord** allows you to carry out your sworn duty in ways that will honor and never offend the Father.

Today, we celebrate the feast of St. Michael the Archangel. In the first reading, he leads the angels on the heavenly battlefield and defeats Satan, and drives him from heaven. At the end of the battle, it appears that the bad news is that Satan is driven to earth. However, the Good News is that the crucified Christ defeats him and evil, once and for all on the cross.

St. Michael, as the patron saint of first responders, represents the power of goodness in the strife against evil. Goodness does not do violence against evil, it resists it. St. Michael is a model of your vocation to fend off evil by healing, comforting, and guarding the most vulnerable and innocent. You are called to work alongside a legion of men and women whose days are shaped by both generosity and responsibility. While St. Michael and his band of angels made certain there is no place for evil in heaven, I encourage each of you to join the battle that protects and preserves life, and helps those you serve feel the gift of hope that you bring, even in the shadows of hurt and sadness. St. Michael helps you to see that yours is a vocation of life, shaped by such virtues as honor, selflessness, and duty, bringing peace to daily life.

This morning we also come together to pray for each of your families, who often live in fear and uncertainty, understanding how fragile life can be. Let us pray this morning, that Our Blessed Mother will comfort and strengthen them in the faith of our compassionate and merciful God.

I thank you this morning for each day that you are willing to trade your life for the safety of another. I thank you for each day that you are willing to be wounded when you kneel alongside the injured and dying. I thank you for each day that you help goodness triumph over evil, even when the victories seem insufficient. I thank you for all that you give each day for "No person was every honored for what he received. Honor has been reward for what he or she gave."ⁱ

¹ President Calvin Coolidge.