

## REMEMBERING AND PRAYING FOR FIRST RESPONDERS

**Prelude:** “I vow to thee my country” Words Cecil Spring-Rice Music: *Thaxted* (Gustav Holst) in *Ancient and Modern, and Songs of Praise*

*I vow to thee, my country, all earthly things above,  
Entire and whole and perfect, the service of my love;  
The love that asks no question, the love that stands the test,  
That lays upon the altar the dearest and the best;  
The love that never falters, the love that pays the price,  
The love that makes undaunted the final sacrifice.*

*And there's another country, I've heard of long ago,  
Most dear to them that love her, most great to them that know;  
We may not count her armies, we may not see her King;  
Her fortress is a faithful heart, her pride is suffering;  
And soul by soul and silently her shining bounds increase,  
And her ways are ways of gentleness, and all her paths are peace.*

### **Proverbs 3:13-18**

**Psalm 27:1** – “The LORD is my light and my salvation—whom shall I fear? The LORD is the stronghold of my life—of whom shall I be afraid?”

**Psalm 91** – “Whoever dwells in the shelter of the Most High will rest in the shadow of the Almighty. I will say of the LORD, ‘He is my refuge and my fortress, my God, in whom I trust.’ Surely he will save you from the fowler’s snare and from the deadly pestilence. He will cover you with his feathers, and under his wings you will find refuge; his faithfulness will be your shield and rampart.

*“You will not fear the terror of night, nor the arrow that flies by day, nor the pestilence that stalks in the darkness, nor the plague that destroys at midday. A thousand may fall at your side, ten thousand at your right hand, but it will not come near you. You will only observe with your eye and see the punishment of the wicked.*

*“If you say, ‘The LORD is my refuge,’ and you make the Most High your dwelling, no harm will overtake you, no disaster will come near your tent. For he will command his angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways; they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone. You will tread on the lion and the cobra; you will trample the great lion and the serpent.*

*“‘Because he loves me,’ says the LORD, ‘I will rescue him; I will protect him, for he acknowledges my name. He will call on me, and I will answer him; I will be with him in trouble, I will deliver him and honor him. With long life I will satisfy him and show him my salvation.’”*

### **1 Cor 3:9-16**

## *Luke 23:32-43*

### *Homily*

In our gospel reading today (Lk 23:33-43) we have Luke's description of Jesus on the cross. He is called "The King of the Jews" as he lays down his life for them, and indeed for all of us. He shows himself as our Lord Jesus as he is an example for us, as his followers, to be laying down our lives for others in the name of Christ. People who reflect his example of service are firefighters and first responders, police and health care workers, and teachers and parents. In fact all of us can take time for others, and be generous to those in need.

I remember once myself waking up to the sound of smoke alarms, and rushing *out* of the danger in the house with our small family. When the fire engine arrived, the firemen bravely raced *into* the house and danger. They found that the oil furnace had burst into flame and had pumped thick, choking smoke through the house.

I read an **ABC News report** of one very brave firefighter. The report reads as follows: "After 21 years of fighting some of New York's toughest fires, including a 1998 blaze that almost killed him, firefighter Timothy Stackpole proudly served his first day as captain on Sept. 10.

"The next day, he was one of the hundreds of firemen who answered the call after the World Trade Center was struck by two airliners — and one of the 343 who was killed when the twin towers collapsed.

Stackpole, who was a legend in the Fire Department after surviving the 1998 fire, was dedicated to his job to the end.

"The greatest high you can get in life is by helping somebody," he said in a public service announcement that was taped before his death. He taped the message for the hospital that helped him recover from the terrible burns he suffered in the 1998 fire.

"Stackpole grew up in the Brooklyn neighborhood of Marine Park, the same area where he would eventually raise his own five kids.

"His family was his top priority, said his wife Tara. "That was like a million dollars to him. He just enjoyed being with the kids every day," she said.

"Stackpole was also passionate about his job. While fighting a four-alarm fire at a Brooklyn row house in the summer of 1998, he heard that a woman was trapped inside. Without hesitation, he and two colleagues did what firemen do: they ran into the flames to save someone.

"While the three firefighters were inside, the floor collapsed without warning. It killed one of the three firefighters, and severely burned Stackpole's ankles.

“Firefighter Michael Brady rode with Stackpole.” In that moment, he was still ‘Timmy,’ Brady recalled. “He was still comforting the EMT workers, who were shocked with what was going on, and cheering them on: ‘Thank you brother. Thank you for helping me.’ His zeal could never be squashed.”

“After 66 days, Stackpole limped out of the hospital to a hero’s welcome, returning to work soon afterward. Though he could have retired from the department and gotten a pension, Stackpole chose not to.

“It was his life, his calling,” said his wife. “He couldn’t not do it. This is what he felt he was supposed to do in his life.”

“Tara Stackpole remembers Sept. 11 beginning as a normal day. “It was a normal routine Tuesday. He kissed us goodbye and told me he loved me,” she said.

“It turned out that Timmy Stackpole was among the first to get to Ground Zero. He led a team that ran into 2 World Trade Center to rescue victims after it was struck. He and the others all perished when the tower collapsed. Recovery workers found his body a week later.”

Someone else wrote this: “To some people, it might seem foolhardy to charge into the flames to rescue someone you never saw before and may never see again. It’s not that firefighters don’t think about the danger. They’re human and don’t want to die, just like everyone else. But ... they do what has to be done despite their fears.”

This is the spirit of lifting up others at the risk or the actual cost of our own lives; that same spirit that we can see, for example, in doctors like our own Dr. David R King, in nurses, in police, in teachers, and in parents. That spirit of lifting up others is what we can all do in our best moments, and sometimes we all do so; and it is reflected, par excellence, in the death of Jesus to save us all. It is the best and highest moment of humanity.

I would like to conclude with one last point. There on the cross, one thief mocked the sacrifice of Jesus, while the other thief acknowledged his faults, and acknowledged Jesus as his messiah and king. The repentant, believing thief’s word of testimony remains with us today, ringing through the ages and around the world.

Can you say in your life what dark place you found yourself, and you met God there? See if you can describe it in a minute or so. Then, like the thief on the cross, and like the first responders, have the courage to bring that life giving account of your experience to those around you. *By John Derek Stubbs*

## ***PRAYERS***

Gracious God, first responders have such dangerous jobs! Help them to dwell in your shadow and be sheltered by your protection. May you always be their refuge in difficult situations. May they trust in you completely and continually moment by moment. Show them your power when they find themselves in unsafe situations or when they face people who threaten or try to harm them. Keep them safe for the glory of your name!

Father, we are so blessed to have men and women who work diligently for our safety and well-being, even when their jobs are difficult or thankless. Help us to continually remember to give thanks to you for their sacrifices and service to our community. May we touch heaven with prayers of gratitude whenever we see or personally encounter first responders. Give them the strength that you provide so that as they serve, you will be honored.

Blessed are you, Lord, God of mercy,  
who through your Son  
gave us a marvelous example of charity  
and the great commandment of love for one another.  
Send down your blessings on these your servants,  
who so generously devote themselves to helping others.  
Grant them courage when they are afraid,  
wisdom when they must make quick decisions,  
strength when they are weary,  
and compassion in all their work.  
When the alarm sounds  
and they are called to aid both friend and stranger,  
let them faithfully serve you in their neighbor.  
We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

*– adapted from the Book of Blessings, #587, by Diana Macalintal*

O judge and savior of the nations, we remember before you with grateful hearts the men and women of our community and country who in times of crisis and danger venture all for our safety. Grant that we may always keep them in prayer and support them in their service. This we ask in the name of the one who died to rescue us all, Jesus Christ our Lord.