

In 1909 a new dam was built in the neighboring town of Austin Pennsylvania. It was to be the largest concrete gravity dam in Pennsylvania and cost a whopping \$86,000 which is equivalent in purchasing power to just over \$2 million dollars today.

It was a formidable structure that stood about 50 feet tall and spanned about 530 feet. Over 15,000 cubic yards of concrete impounded 250 million gallons of water. However, less than two years later a failure in the dam caused it to fault, the dam broke, the water was unleashed, destruction and disaster followed. The pulp and paper mill was obliterated, the town devastated, and 78 people lost their lives.

I share that illustration and reminder with you today as we join in prayer and support of our emergency personnel and law enforcement because we are witnessing in our day a mounting pressure placed upon these public servants.

I share that illustration and reminder with you today because like many of you I know these men and women, their children, and their families and I see the stress, the burden, and the toll that their job has taken on them, their loved ones, and their relationships.

I share that illustration and reminder with you today because these men and women take upon themselves burdens, stress, and pressures each and every day for us.

They keep the night watch, they respond to fires, they risk being shot by bullets, they endure the assaults (According to the FBI in 2017 60,211 officers out of the 596,604 were assaulted or 10.1%), the attacks, the injuries and the insults of man.

They do the ugly work that most eyes would hesitate to look upon, that most ears would find harsh and offensive, and most stomachs would find intolerable and repulsive.

Growing up, I had a classmate whose father was a police officer in the inner city and who took to the bottle to handle the stress of his job, to calm

his nerves, and to relax his body, and subsequently he lost his marriage and his family. Another officer from the prison would drop off police clothing: (i.e. sweatshirts, sweatpants, and t-shirts) in big black bags at our house on the lower west side of the city because he saw a family of 13 who's kids had patches on their pants and didn't have extra money to buy the name brand clothing that other kids were wearing.

I saw that same prison guard become hardened over time, calloused, cold, and cynical under the weight of this pressure: the seemingly ineffective nature of the justice system to reform and to rehabilitate criminals, the cruel realities of crime, violence, sin and vice. The cyclic behavior of repeat offenders and the socio-economic factors that made it nearly impossible to escape the snares and tightly woven webs of destructive behavior and lifestyles.

I remember taking the phone call when that officer buckled under the weight of that pressure, succumbed to the difficulties of life, and took his own life.

In addition, I've sat and listened to numerous officers as they describe the harsh realities they encounter every day in drug infested neighborhoods and broken households where abuse and domestic violence are a common occurrence and victims look to them as their only hope, their only lifeline, and their only support in these dark, grim, and horrid realities that they live in.

Police officers and emergency personnel act as a dam holding back that next blow by an abusive spouse, holding back that vehicle driven by an intoxicated driver, holding back the torrential flood waters, the chaos and havoc, the unrest, the anarchy, the violence, and rebellion that constantly threatens our families, our schools, and our society and our country.

They take upon themselves the mounting pressures of those forces, they hold them back, they stand as a defense and a barrier between good and evil, night and day, light and darkness, life and death and if that dam were ever to break, then devastation, destruction, and disaster would follow.

It is believed that the Austin flood could have been prevented if that dam had been supported by a cut-off wall underneath of it.

According to Michael Guidon and Christine Crater who researched the Austin dam:

“A cut-off wall is an impenetrable vertical wall that runs along the length of a dam at some depth below pre-existing grade. Such a wall prevents water from flowing through the ground and underneath a dam. If water is allowed to flow below a dam, then the dam will experience uplift pressure. Uplift pressure works against gravity by lessening the effective weight of the dam and the consequence is a decrease in the amount of water that the dam can hold back. When uplift pressure is great enough a dam will no longer be able to withstand the load delivered by its design capacity.” As a cost saving measure this feature was not included in the building of the Austin dam and the result was according to the author, “catastrophic sliding failure.”

There exists in our world and in our country today radical voices hell-bent on destroying

America, demolishing its systems of governance, and ridding her of all ties to the past, her roots, her Constitution and ultimately her independence and her freedom.

And these orchestrators of civil unrest, these organizers of riots and looting, these instigators of mass violence in our cities and on our streets are attempting to create uplift pressure by the power of their cries: Down with America, down with the police, down with the flag, down with statues and memorials, down with the government, down with morality, down with civility, down with prayer in our schools, down with the Ten Commandments in our squares, down with God and authority

As Christians and faithful citizens of these United States we have an obligation and a duty to stand as a cut-off wall against this anarchy and rebellion, to support our country, to support our government, to support our emergency personnel, and to support the men and women who stand on the thin blue line.

In other words we ought to be patriotic.

Patriotism according to St. Thomas Aquinas is a

virtue affiliated with the virtue of piety and love of God for a man cannot love God if he has not love for his neighbor. Patriotism is a love of God, a love of neighbor, and a love of country. Patriotism is an acknowledgement of the debt one owes his or her country and finds expression in reverence, loyalty, and devotion. The opposite of patriotism is treachery. Treachery finds its expression in betrayal, deception, lies and deceit.

Therefore any group or individual promising you justice without law and order, or freedom void of morality, or peace without peacemakers or society without government is not patriotic. They are imposters, deceivers, liars, and frauds of the worst kind.

Like those invited to the wedding feast in today's gospel who refused and ignored God, laid hold of his servants, mistreated them, and killed them, they are a wicked and Godless bunch and you will know them by their fruits. Archbishop Fulton Sheen once said: "If we wish to keep our forests we must keep our trees; if we wish to keep the light we must keep the sun;"

and I would add if we wish to keep our heads than we must not lose them like a mad mob. If we wish to keep our rights we must keep what is essential to defend and protect those rights namely the men and women of our military to protect us from outside forces and our law enforcement and emergency personnel to protect us from dangers and threats from within. Additionally, Archbishop Sheen says, “If we wish to keep our rights then we must keep our God.” He is the guarantee of those rights, the source and origin of those rights, and the author and giver of those rights.

As pastor I made a decision to honor these men and women today, to stand with them, to support them, and to show them our appreciation not only for their service but for the way they serve. The vast majority of our police officers and emergency personnel serve with good hearts, flawed and human but more valuable than gold. I thank you for your valor, your selflessness, and for the many sacrifices you make for us each and every day.

May these flags raised before our church be a reminder to you of our support and an echo of our voices crying out: Up with the flag, up with America, up with our emergency personnel, up with the police, up to God, up to Heaven with our prayers of gratitude and thanks.