



# Dolorosa

SPECIAL EDITION

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Over the course of my brief three years as a priest, I have had a variety of experiences when traveling in airports throughout the country, and I have met a number of people from all walks of life. Perhaps the most moving experience I have had in an airport was when I saw firsthand the return of a United States soldier who had been killed in the Middle East.

This past June 17, while en route to Saint Louis, I had a layover in the Baltimore-Washington International Airport. I was grading some philosophy exams in an empty part of the airport when I noticed a number of people standing by the window looking outside. They were trying to see what was happening on the tarmac. An announcement was eventually made that a plane carrying the body of a twenty-nine-year-old U.S. Marine was in range and would be landing. Waiting on the tarmac for the plane's arrival were a number of policemen and military servicemen in uniform. The young soldier's family was also there. At length, the plane landed and the casket was removed. An American flag was placed over the casket, and it was carried to the hearse. The grief-stricken parents of the soldier, accompanied by their other children and relatives, followed the casket. It was truly one of the saddest scenes I have ever witnessed.

The whole event gave me much to ponder. In particular, it made me reflect upon the large number of United States' soldiers, police officers, and firefighters

who are in the same danger of death as they carry out their respective duties. This, of course, includes our own people at our chapels across the country who serve in the United States military or in the police and fire departments.



While it is true that there are instances of corruption in the military and police force, nonetheless we have many, many good soldiers and police officers who are truly trying to keep the United States safe. They are thus entitled to our prayers to assist them in carrying out their duties and to obtain God's protection that they may remain safe. The virtue of piety, which obliges us to love and pray for our country, should spur us on to pray for those who serve and protect that country we love. It matters not whether we agree with the wars





and skirmishes into which our government enters the country, we ought, nevertheless, to pray for those who serve in the military and the law enforcement.

With all the chaos, sin, and temptation in the world today, these men and women are in a near constant state of danger, both spiritually and bodily. Those who serve in the Army, the Navy, the Marine Corps, the Air Force, the Coast Guard, and the National Guard put themselves on the line to protect and defend our country and her interests. How many have died throughout the years? How many in recent years? As the madness in the Middle East continues, as wars and rumors of war continue to spread, how many more will die for our country? Our soldiers thus need many prayers for their physical well-being.

Unfortunately, in our country today, there seems to be a growing hatred for police officers. In fact, one officer said to me: "We seem to have become the targets." Sad as this statement is, it is true to a certain extent. These very men are the ones who have become the objects of hatred and derision by certain civilians and even by some media outlets. Yet, in spite of this, these men and women continue to serve our country and keep its citizens safe. Like the policemen, the firemen, too, work each day to keep Americans safe. They willingly risk their lives to save others. One only has to look at the World Trade Center attack of 2001 to see this. In fact, such may be said of any first responders—they work so that we may live safely and securely in this world.

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It must be noted, however, that grave as the physical danger is for our soldiers, police officers, and firefighters, they are in a danger still more serious—the danger to their eternal salvation. They are subject to temptation just as we are but, at times, to an even greater degree. This is because many others who serve in the military, police force, and fire department are godless and loaded with vice and thus constitute occasions of sin. Living in the midst of this, then, Catholic servicemen, policemen, and firemen need the protection of heaven and many graces not only for their physical safety, but also for their spiritual well-being.

Such heavenly protection occurred years ago during the Korean War. The Korean War began on June 25, 1950; it ended on July 27, 1953. Over the course of those three years, almost 40,000 Americans died in action, and more than 100,000 were wounded. It was during this war, however, that an unbelievable event occurred. This incredible, but true, story was related in a letter from a United States marine to his mother. The marine, whose name was Michael, was wounded on the battlefield in Korea. He was shot in the chest by a Communist soldier, and thus he wrote the letter from his hospital bed. However, he wrote the letter not to inform his mother that he was wounded; rather he wrote it to tell her his amazing story.

Michael began by assuring his mother that he was alright and that he was already recovering from







his wound. He, then, asked her if she remembered the prayer she had taught him to say to Saint Michael every day:

Michael, Michael of the morning,  
Fresh corps of Heaven adorning,  
Keep me safe today,  
And in time of temptation  
Drive the devil away.

Michael explained that when he got to Korea, he prayed it all the more and with greater fervor and devotion. "I said it every day," he wrote, "sometimes when I was marching or sometimes resting, but always before I went to sleep. I even got some of the other fellas to say it."

The letter then goes on to tell what happened to Michael. One day his squad was on a dangerous reconnaissance mission. It was a mission that went beyond the front lines. They were scouting for Communist troops. As Michael was plodding along in the bitter cold, all of a sudden another marine began walking at his side. Michael had never seen this man before. The fellow soldier was bigger than any other marine he knew. The two soldiers continued trudging along in silence while the rest of Michael's platoon spread out. Eventually Michael decided to strike up a conversation, so he said to the other marine, "I have never seen you before, and I thought I knew every man in the outfit."

"I just joined at the last minute," the other soldier replied. "The name is Michael."

"Is that so—that's my name too."

"I know," he said.

The two soldiers continued walking. Neither of them spoke for a time until the new marine broke the silence. "We're going to have some trouble up ahead," he said.

Michael thought to himself, "With the [Communists] all around that's no great revelation."

All of a sudden, thick snow began to fall. In a moment, the whole countryside was blotted out. During the snowfall, the two marines lost the rest of the patrol. In a few minutes, the snow stopped as abruptly as it had begun. The two soldiers looked for the rest of the squad but saw no one. Michael looked ahead as they came over a little rise. What happened next is best described in Michael's own words. To his mother, he wrote:

Mom, my heart stopped. There were seven of them. Seven Commies in their padded pants and jackets and their funny hats. Only there wasn't anything funny about them now. Seven rifles were aimed at us.

"Down, Michael!" I screamed and hit the frozen earth. I heard those rifles fire almost as one. I heard the bullets. [But] there was Michael still standing.

Mom, those guys couldn't have missed; not at that range. I expected to see [Michael] literally blown to bits. But there he stood, making no effort to fire himself.

Michael thought his companion must have been paralyzed with fear, so he jumped up to pull him down, and that



was when he was shot. He felt a sudden flame in his chest and realized he was shot. Michael then described to his mother what he saw next:

I remember feeling strong arms about me, arms that laid me ever so gently on a pillow of snow. I opened my eyes for one last look. I was dying. Maybe I was even already dead. . . . Maybe I was looking into the sun. Maybe I was in shock. But it seemed I saw Michael standing erect again, only this time his face was shining with a terrible splendor. As I say, maybe it was the sun in my eyes, but he seemed to change as I watched him. He grew bigger . . . [and] there was a brightness around him like the wings of an angel. In his hand was a sword that flashed with a million lights.

That was the last thing Michael remembered until the rest of his contingent found him. When he came around, he asked his fellow soldiers where Michael was.

"Where's who?" asked one of the marines.

"Michael—that big marine I was walking with just before the snow squall hit us."

The sergeant of the platoon then said to him, "Kid, you weren't walking with anyone. I had my eyes on you the whole time. You were getting too far out. I was just going to call you in when you disappeared in the snow." Then the sergeant looked at Michael curiously. "How did you do it, kid?"

"How'd I do what? [All I know is that] this marine named Michael and I were just . . ."

The sergeant kindly interrupted and said, "Son, I picked this outfit myself, and there just ain't another Michael in it. You are the only Mike." The sergeant asked again, "Just how did you do it, kid? We heard the shots, but there hasn't been a single shot fired from your rifle, and there isn't a bit of lead in them seven bodies over the hill there."

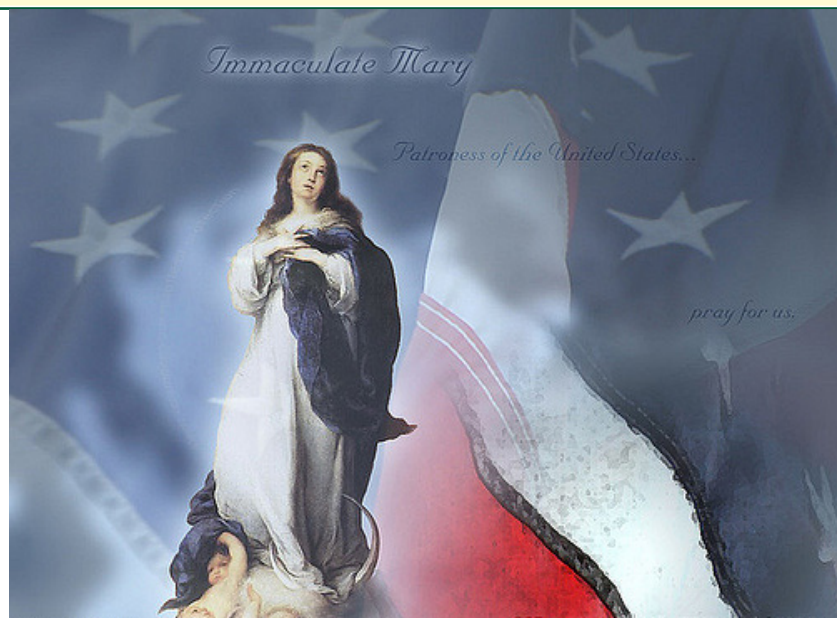
Michael didn't say anything. He just stared in amazement. It was then that the sergeant spoke again, "Kid, every one of those seven Commies was killed by a sword stroke."

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*" . . . he seemed to change as I watched him. He grew bigger . . . [and] there was a brightness around him like the wings of an angel. In his hand was a sword that flashed with a million lights."*

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As Catholics, we know how this young marine's life was saved. We know how those Communist soldiers were killed. The mysterious marine named Michael was no marine at all. He was an archangel. Today, September



29, we celebrate the feast of this glorious and powerful archangel. Saint Michael is the patron of soldiers and police officers, and, while not—strictly speaking—the patron of firefighters, he nonetheless certainly protects them as well.

Today, our Catholic soldiers, police officers, firefighters, and first responders need Saint Michael's special protection—the protection that was given to that marine. The young marine Michael was engaged in battle against the godless and anti-Catholic Communists in Korea, but because of his strong devotion to Saint Michael, this heavenly warrior came to his aid in a most extraordinary way. Not only did he save the young marine's life, but he also defeated his enemies.

In our own day, those who serve our country are also engaged in battle, not only with enemies who would take their lives, but with an enemy far more evil than the godless North Koreans of Michael's time—an enemy that would take their souls. That enemy is the devil. As our servicemen work day in and day out for our country, they desperately need prayers to assist them and to protect them from both their physical and their spiritual enemies. I have, therefore, decided to start a pious practice in honor of Saint Michael in the sodality—a pious practice in which all the sodality members can participate by beseeching Saint Michael to protect the spiritual and temporal welfare of active and retired U.S. soldiers, police officers, firemen, and all first responders, and by praying for the eternal salvation of all those who have died whether in action or otherwise. We will call it Saint Michael's Sunday. Very simply it consists in this:

- on the last Sunday of every month, we will offer up our Mass and Holy Communion for the spiritual and physical welfare of active and retired Catholic soldiers, policemen, firemen, and all first responders, and for the eternal salvation of those who are deceased.



- on that day, we will pray in private the prayer to Saint Michael, printed in the little holy card, for this intention. (The file for this prayer is attached to the e-mail).

In this way, we will do our small part in making a return to those who serve our country and in striving to obtain protection and safety for those who spend themselves for our protection and safety.

For those sodality members who do not have access to Mass and Holy Communion on the last Sunday of the month, I encourage you to make a Spiritual Communion for this intention. "A Spiritual Communion," as Saint Alphonsus explains in *Visits to the Blessed Sacrament*, "consists in an ardent desire to receive Jesus in the Most Holy Sacrament and in lovingly embracing Him as if we had actually received Him" (xviii). Spiritual Communions can be made whenever and as often as one chooses each day. There are various methods and prayers for making a Spiritual Communion. Saint Alphonsus' Short Act of Spiritual Communion is as follows: "O Jesus, I believe that Thou art in the Most Blessed Sacrament! Come into my heart. I embrace Thee; oh, never leave me!" (xx).

Now, I want to emphasize two points: first, that this is a private practice and thus the prayer to Saint Michael is not to be prayed out loud in common; second, that no sodality member is obliged to take part in this devotion. It is not sinful if one does not take part—it is not even a fault. There is no obligation whatsoever. If one would rather say only the prayer and not offer up Mass and Communion, that is fine. If one would prefer only to offer up Mass and Communion and not say the prayer, that is fine. If one does not want to take part in this pious practice at all, that is fine, too. Yet, at the same time, I do encourage all the sodality members to participate if they are able. I believe much good can be accomplished through this practice, and as the world situation grows

more and more bleak, those who serve our country will need our prayers. Besides, when you stop to think about it, how many people are there today who pray for our soldiers, policemen, firemen, and first responders?

Each month, during the week leading up to the last Sunday, I intend to send a reminder e-mail about Saint Michael's Sunday. Over time, I hope to compile a list of names—relatives, friends, etc.—who serve or who have served our country in the military, the police department, or the fire department. This list I will attach to the monthly reminder e-mail so that we can remember to pray especially for those who are known to us. If you would like anyone added to the list, please e-mail me with their first and last names. Please also include which branch of the military they are in, or if they are with the police department or the fire department.

In his inaugural address on January 20, 1961, President John F. Kennedy uttered these now famous words: "Ask not what your country can do for you; ask what you can do for your country." All those who serve in the military and in the police and fire departments have asked themselves—whether consciously or not—what they can do for America. They have answered by serving her. Let us, therefore, as good Catholic Americans, ask not what these men and women who serve can do for us; let us ask, rather, what we can do for them. What we can do is pray and sacrifice often for their spiritual and physical safety.

May the Blessed Virgin Mary, the Immaculate Patroness of the United States of America, cover our country with her motherly mantle of protection and drive Satan and his agents from our beloved nation. May Saint Michael protect and assist those who serve America at home and abroad, may he bring those who serve on foreign soil back home, and may he lead all those who serve and have served God and country to their heavenly home.

*"Our flag does not fly because the wind moves it. It flies with the last breath of each soldier who died protecting it."*

*—Author Unknown*

