

Hidden Heroes, Good Samaritans and Next-Door Saints: Frontline Health Workers, Employees and Public Safety Personnel

One of the famous quotes from Martin Luther King, Jr. is, ***“Only when it is dark enough can you see the stars.”*** In the last few months, and more so in recent weeks, our country has experienced profound darkness of pain, grief, losses. People grieve the loss of loved ones. More than four-thousand homes are grieving today silently for the lives that were lost to Coronavirus. In many parts of the world, families cannot even have a gathering for a funeral or a proper religious burial because of the social distancing policies that have changed so many aspects of our ordinary daily life.

Many people are isolated, either because of the illness of this virus or fear of being infected by it. Children are away from school and friends, elderly are isolated in nursing homes without any visitors of loved ones, many sick people in hospitals cannot have the comfort of friends to visit them, etc. Such isolation can cause sadness of the present moment and fear of the unknown.

Other people are being challenged economically, especially those who have lived their daily life from paycheck to paycheck. Many have lost their jobs and many more have had to stay home for an uncertain amount of time.

In these very challenging, dark times I often hear people asking when this will be over, or hoping for the day that their lives will be back to normal. Reflecting on the facts and the reality of what Coronavirus has caused globally and nationally, yes, we have already lost so much. Yet in some ways, all our essential needs as a nation continue to be met and provided for. The light of such providence would have not been possible without the generosity and selflessness of so many of our hidden heroes, Good Samaritans, and what Pope Francis calls them, ***“the saints next door.”*** In his recent homily on March 27, Pope Francis encouraged us to think of these individuals who are ***“often forgotten people – who do not appear in newspaper and magazine headlines nor on the grand catwalks of the latest show, but who without any doubt are in these very days writing the decisive events of our time: doctors, nurses, supermarket employees, cleaners, caregivers, providers of transport, law and order forces, volunteers...”***, they all remind us that we are not alone.

When I think of the people who have died alone, whether in nursing homes or hospitals, their caregivers and healthcare workers were the only family they knew before they passed from this world. In many hospitals, nursing homes and medical centers across the country, we have countless doctors, nurses and healthcare workers who operate the hospital from testing to changing sheets and towels in patients’ rooms, delivering food, cleaning the floors, emptying the trash, etc. These individuals are on the frontline of fighting this virus. They not only risk their own lives by going to work every day, but many times the lives of their loved ones at home if they ever carry the virus because of their work in such infected environments.

We all continue to have food in our homes because of the tireless effort of all those who work in grocery stores to continue restocking the shelves 24/7 so that we can all have all that we need to take care of our families and loved ones. All the people who work at post offices and many other delivery companies continue to deliver all our needs of packages, letters, gifts, etc.

All the employees of public services continue to take care of cleaning our neighborhoods and cities. All the bank workers and financial centers are there to assist with all the financial daily needs of each individual. Many of the faithful journalists who are working tirelessly to bring the latest updated needed information to our American people, the stories that they cover become personal to some of them who have already been infected by this virus. Yes, in the last two months many people have been blessed to be able to work from home, yet these frontline workers have no such option but to be there every day for each and every one of us.

Along with these frontline warriors and hidden heroes we are also blessed by the Good Samaritans in our community, all the public safety personnel who are always there 24/7 providing for the safety and the care of the people in our local community. In my Christian faith, Jesus said, ***“No one has greater love than this, to lay down one’s life for one’s friends,”*** John 15:13. Our police officers, fire fighters, they work hand-in-hand not only to keep our homes and city safe from all harm, but also are right there with every medical 9-1-1 call to accompany the EMTs and paramedics to ensure the safety of those who are in need of medical assistance. Along with their commitment to serve and save lives, it is amazing to see how much each department tries to do to contribute to the charitable causes in their city and beyond.

Yes, the effect of Coronavirus shook our nation and the whole world. In some ways, people think their lives have turned upside down. Many others called this situation the worst nightmare that people of this generation have experienced. In the midst of these long nights of grief, suffering, fear and yes, even panic, we all can look around and find countless stars shining to illumine the darkness of these days. The light of these ordinary stars around us is what gives us hope that things will get better and we will go through this together.

In Governor William Bradford’s journal *Of Plymouth Plantation*, he described the journey of the settlement and the struggles of his fellow Pilgrims, who arrived in this land in 1620 aboard the small ship “Mayflower”, and who had made a new home in Plymouth, Massachusetts, with the guidance of the Almighty God and the help of some Native Americans. He wrote: ***“Thus out of small beginnings greater things have been produced by God’s hand that made all things of nothing, and gives being to all things that are; and, as one small candle may light a thousand, so the light here kindled has shone unto many...”*** Today in our nation we have countless number of people whose candle of service will not only ignite hope for the millions of Americans today but for generations to come.

Saint Teresa of Calcutta once said, ***“Intense love does not measure, it just gives.”*** This truly echoes what our public safety personnel, healthcare workers, and frontline employees do who are out there every day without measure and giving their all to people who are hurting because of Coronavirus. And they do so indeed with concrete acts of love. For each one of these hidden heroes, Good Samaritans and next-door saints, we are eternally grateful. Their daily commitment to serve one day will be remembered in the history of our nation. We are already, and we will be, better people and a better nation because of each one of them.

By: Mother Olga of the Sacred Heart
Servant mother of the Daughters of Mary of Nazareth in Quincy, MA