



GREEK ORTHODOX METROPOLIS OF CHICAGO

ΙΕΡΑ ΜΗΤΡΟΠΟΛΙΣ ΣΙΚΑΓΟΥ

**Funeral Eulogy for Officer John Bartholomew
Delivered by Metropolitan Nathanael of Chicago
Saint Andrew Greek Orthodox Church, Chicago
May 2026**

Reverend clergy, Mayor Johnson, Superintendent Snelling, distinguished elected officials and civic leaders, first responders, members of the Chicago Police Department and the broader law enforcement community, honored guests, and most especially the beloved Bartholomew family:

Brothers and sisters in the Risen Lord,

Christ is Risen! Truly He is Risen!

For forty days after Pascha, Orthodox Christians greet one another with words of victory and hope: “Christ is Risen! Truly He is Risen!” We proclaim this not as a custom or mere religious slogan, but because the Resurrection of Jesus Christ changes everything—even the way we stand before death itself.

Today, however, these words are not easy to proclaim. And still, there are no words perhaps more necessary for wounded and grieving hearts to hear. For it is precisely in moments of grief and sorrow that the Resurrection of Jesus Christ ceases to be a distant religious idea and becomes the very hope by which we endure the suffering of this life.

We gather in this holy church grieving the death of Officer John Bartholomew: beloved husband, devoted father, cherished son and brother, faithful member of the Church, loyal friend, and courageous officer of the Chicago Police Department. His death has pierced the hearts of his beloved wife Renee and their precious children, Oliver, Miles, and Sophia. It has brought sorrow to his parents, Kiki and George, to his brother Jimmy and his

sister Paula, to his fellow officers, his fellow parishioners, and indeed to the entire City of Chicago.

And so even now, amid grief and sorrow, we dare proclaim the Resurrection of Christ precisely because the Resurrection reveals what is ultimately true about human life: ***that love is stronger than death, that suffering does not have the final word, and that even in the deepest sorrow, hope remains possible.***

The Resurrection does not ask us to deny grief. Even our Lord Jesus Christ wept at the tomb of His friend Lazarus (John 11:35). But neither does the Resurrection allow us to surrender to despair. As we hear during the Paschal vigil service: *“Let no one fear death, for the death of the Savior has set us all free.”*

And every year, throughout this Paschal season, we chant time and time again: *“Christ is risen from the dead, trampling down death by death, and upon those in the tombs bestowing life.”* This hymn is not poetry alone; it is the truth upon which we stand today.

As a Greek Orthodox Christian, John heard these words from childhood. He heard them standing in this church as an altar boy. He heard them from priests, family members, parishioners, and friends. He learned that ***faith is not merely something spoken in moments of celebration, but something carried into sacrifice, suffering, and service.***

John learned early that life finds its meaning not in self-preservation, but in self-offering. He witnessed this first in his family and especially in the life of his grandfather, the late Fr. John Kutulas, whose name he proudly bore.

John did not simply perform acts of service. Service became the shape of his life.

He served as a husband and father. He served his family, his friends, and his community. And for nearly eleven years, he served the people of Chicago as a police officer.

Those who knew Officer Bartholomew speak not only of his courage, but of his gentleness, humility, compassion, and calm presence in difficult situations. Even after exhausting shifts and sleepless nights, he continued to give himself completely to the people entrusted to his care.

This is the sacred burden carried by our first responders, especially by those who serve in law enforcement. Our sons and daughters, our brothers and sisters, our husbands and wives who serve in this way enter fearful places time and time again so that they may protect others and restore peace amid chaos. ***While others flee danger, they move toward it.***

And this kind of service is more than a profession. It is a calling.

Just as some are called by God to serve at the Holy Altar, others are called to serve in places of danger, suffering, and fear. The vocation of the first responder—the police officer, firefighter, paramedic, and others who place themselves between danger and human life—requires far more than strength or skill alone. ***It requires the heart to love, the courage to sacrifice, and the soul to place oneself at the service of another human being.***

And it is precisely this kind of love—sacrificial, self-emptying, and courageous—that leaves us wounded today.

The death of Officer John Bartholomew has left deep wounds in all of us. His family carries this pain. His fellow officers carry it. The Church carries it. The entire City of Chicago carries it.

But friends, the Resurrection of Jesus Christ reveals something remarkable about wounds. After His Resurrection, Christ still bears the wounds of the Cross. The marks of the nails remain in His hands and feet. The wound from the lance remains in His side. Even in His glorified body, His wounds are not erased.

As we wrestle with this notion, we come to realize that *true love is ecstatic*. True love draws us out of ourselves and toward another person. It refuses to remain closed in upon itself. *And because love is ecstatic, love invites us to experience greater vulnerability.*

Love is a doorway and an invitation to wounded life.

You cannot truly love another person unless you are prepared to be wounded by them. *And brothers and sisters, only those whose hearts have been wounded are prepared to love more fully.*

A parent knows this. A spouse knows this. A friend knows this. Those who rush toward danger for the sake of another human being know this. First responders know this. Police officers know this. Officer Bartholomew knew this.

To love deeply is to become susceptible to suffering.

And the pain we feel today is proof not only that we loved John, but that John loved us.

The Apostle Paul writes that love “bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things” (1 Corinthians 13:7). Real love is never distant or self-protective. Real love pours itself out for others.

And this is precisely what Christ reveals to us on the Cross—a love poured out completely for the life of the world.

After Christ is crucified, those who loved Him and followed Him are devastated. They too carried wounded hearts. And yet the Resurrection changed what became of those wounds:

Fear became courage.

Despair became hope.

Hiding became witness.

Sorrow became love poured back into the world.

The Resurrection did not erase their wounds and suffering. It transformed them. And perhaps this is one of the great spiritual struggles before all of us today.

What will become of our grief? What will become of our wounds? Will they harden our hearts? Will they divide us? Will they lead us toward hatred? Or will they deepen our capacity for love, courage, mercy, and service?

In speaking with John's family, I encountered something profoundly Christian and deeply humbling. Even amid unimaginable grief, they speak not of revenge and retribution, but of repentance and reconciliation. Their prayer is that the person responsible for John's death might come to stand truthfully before God and seek forgiveness and healing for the brokenness and darkness that gave rise to such violence.

This does not remove the need for justice. Society must uphold justice seriously and responsibly. All human life is sacred, actions have consequences, and the protection of others requires accountability when violence wounds and destroys human life.

But justice alone cannot heal the wounded heart.

Only love can do that.

Only mercy can transform bitterness.

Only forgiveness can break the cycle of hatred.

Only love can restore what violence tries to destroy.

For Christ reveals that we are called not only to love those who love us, but also to “love our enemies, bless those who curse us, do good to those who hate us, and pray for those who spitefully use us and persecute us” (Matt. 5:44).

And perhaps this is the deepest meaning of John’s final witness. ***John did not lose his life while fleeing danger. He gave his life while serving another human being—even one capable of violence against him.***

Friends, today we gaze upon love not as an abstract idea or an emotion, but as selfless sacrifice. This is why, even through tears, we do not stand here without hope.

We have hope because Christ has trampled down death by death. We have hope because the wounds of love are not forgotten before God. We have hope because the Resurrection reveals that sacrificial love is never lost. As His All-Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew of Constantinople—a spiritual father who has himself carried the wounds of history, suffering, and endurance—often reminds us: no wound, no sorrow, and no act of self-giving love is ever forgotten before God.

And because Christ lives, John lives also.

Not merely in memory. Not merely in photographs or stories. But in the eternal love and mercy of the God whom he served from childhood. For as Saint Paul gently reminds us: “Whether we live or whether we die, we are all sons and daughters of God” (Romans 14:8).

May the Lord grant peace to Renee, to Oliver, Miles, and Sophia, to Kiki and George, to Jimmy and Paula, to the entire Bartholomew and Kutulas families, to the Chicago Police Department, to the entire City of Chicago, and to all who mourn today.

May the memory of Officer John Bartholomew be eternal.

And so, even now, through tears and sorrow, with faith in the Risen Christ and hope in the life of the world to come, we dare once more to proclaim:

Christ is Risen! Truly He is Risen!

Amen.