

Funeral Mass for CAPT. JOSEPH VINACCO, Providence Fire Dept.

Monsignor (Richard) Sheahan, Father (Peter) Mongeon, Erin, Nicholas and Julia, Amanda and Lucas, Mrs. Vinacco, Mrs. Milally, Anthony and Matthew, members of the family, Chief (Scott) Mello, Chief (Daniel) Crowley, President (Paul) Doughty, distinguished members of the Providence Fire Department, both active and retired, as well as firefighters and public safety officials from throughout the region, my dear brothers and sisters in Christ:

It was 46 years ago in St. Mark's Church in Garden City that a tiny child was carried into church. There in long white robes and held lovingly in the arms of his parents, a priest handed a lighted candle to the godparents and said this prayer:

*"Joseph, receive the light of Christ and keep the flame of faith alive in your heart.
When the Lord comes, may you go out to greet Him with all the saints in a
heavenly kingdom."*

My dear friends, we are here today in the splendor of our Cathedral because the Lord has come for our beloved brother, Capt. Vinacco. But we come here to reflect on the fact that the light that JOSEPH was given in Baptism, the light of faith, not only burned brightly in *his* life, but was shown by him every day to others with the true meaning of a Christian life—a life of service to and caring for others.

It is no secret that Joe had two passions in life. The first, we know, was his family, his parents, his beloved wife, his four beautiful children, his brothers and his many relatives. His every waking moment was devoted to them and his hard work ethic was for them. I hope you had a chance to watch the beautiful slide show at the wake last night and the many pictures of Joe and Erin from their earliest days together and throughout the years—the endless smiles, family events, trips to Disneyland and, I think, pictures of every fire engine and rescue truck that Providence has owned in the last 15 years. Joe did not waste a moment, he lived a very full life and now we know why: because in Divine Providence, unknown to him or to us, his years with us would be too brief and his smile and warm embrace gone from us too soon.

His second passion was his duty as a Providence firefighter. Oh, how he loved it and how we loved him. He had a special love for his many years on Rescue 3, a very busy rescue and a very difficult and draining job, tending to the sick, the wounded and the dying for hours without end. But Captain Vinacco was passionate with compassion, entering the lives of total strangers and comforting them at their most difficult times. You know, as Chaplain to both the Providence and Warwick Fire Departments, I have a privilege that few others have. I see up close the work these men and women do every hour of every day, and the blanket of safety that they provide to each of us and the respect they have for everyone—no matter what race, creed, economic status or affiliation. When we call, they come. And when danger roars red hot, they get to work.

Let us be clear, from this pulpit where the truth is always told, that we, the citizens of Providence and throughout the nation, can never pay these brave men and women enough. And the discussions that are often held about that topic miss the glaring fact that we are safe because of them and that they put their lives at risk for us every day. That is why we bring Capt. Vinacco here today and render these honors to this modern day hero—a man who deflected that title in life over and over again and, in fact,

deferred that title to others but a man who earned it himself and who deserves it now and in every day to come.

You may have noticed that Capt. Vinacco took his oath as a firefighter in 2001, the year that changed our world forever. It did not deter him nor alter his task, his goal, or his profession, but instead gave him strength to know that the faith he held in his heart and the love that he had for others would see him through—and it did.

And so today, my dear friends we bring him for one final run, for one last call and one final journey. We bring him here before the Good Lord who first gave him to us to return him with hearts full of gratitude and love and to ask the Lord to look at the long list of all the good he did, the lives he saved, and his own life that he gave – and grant him a place in a heavenly home.

To the members of the Providence Fire Department, Joe’s brothers and sisters in blue: the next time you are at a fire and a hose snags then suddenly comes back to life; or the next time you head for a set of stairs on an icy winter night and you suddenly regain your footing on the slippery ice beneath you; or the next time you are tending to someone and the procedure going all wrong suddenly goes all right you can rest assured that the hidden hand of a beloved Captain from a heavenly department has come to assist you.

Capt. Vinacco, “DOC VINAC,” thanks for making our world, our city and our lives better and brighter places, and may you now hear the voice of Saint Florian, the patron and protector of all firefighters say:

*“Well done, Captain, you have kept the faith, you have fought the fight,
you have served well, enter now the kingdom of your Lord.”*

May you rest in peace. Amen.