

In recent weeks, we've all seen the actions of a Minneapolis police officer that resulted in the death of George Floyd. And in recent years, we've also seen stories on clergy abuse, and daily on the news we see how evil actions of some always rear their ugly head. Evil is all around us. But far more powerful than that is the power of good and love.

You might not know the name of Albuquerque Police Officer Ryan Holets. A few years ago, it was learned that while on duty, he had agreed to adopt a baby from a homeless drug addict about to shoot up heroin in broad daylight.

The media found out about it, and chronicled that encounter, drawing the attention of millions of people worldwide to the story of how Holets' family grew by one on Oct. 12, 2017.

Holets, a religious 27-year-old at the time who values his privacy, didn't do it for the attention. He did it because he felt a calling from God. He knew it was the right thing to do.

On Sept. 23, Holets responded to a call about a possible theft from a convenience store in Albuquerque. By the time he and a police recruit arrived, the thief was no longer there, but Holets noticed some commotion in a grassy area behind the store.

He spotted a woman about to inject a needle into her companion's arm. The woman, Crystal Champ, 35, was eight months pregnant.

With his body camera on, Holets approached the couple and confronted them, "Why are you doing this stuff? It's going to ruin your baby. You're going to kill your baby."

Champ began to sob.

"How dare you judge me? You have no idea how hard this is," was her reply. "I know what a horrible person I am. I know what a horrible situation I'm in." But he also looked at her with the eyes of Christ as a Christian, and saw not a horrible person, but someone hurting.

In the interview with media, Holets acknowledged that he initially judged Crystal and her partner, Tom. But he said he soon learned how badly she longed for her child to go to a good family. He realized Crystal wanted someone to adopt her baby.

And so, Holets offered to do just that.

“His entire being changed,” Crystal said to the reporter who later covered the story. “He just became a human being instead of a police officer.”

Ryan and his wife, Rebecca, were at the University of New Mexico Hospital when Crystal gave birth to a baby girl, Hope, on Oct. 12, one month earlier than her due date.

Doctors needed to treat Hope to help her through withdrawals — “It was very difficult to watch,” Ryan said — but she was able to leave the hospital after a week and a half.

Gradually, the little one gained weight and strength.

When Sgt. Jim Edison learned what Holets did, he was floored. In his 10 years as a police officer, he said he has seen many “heroic acts,” but none like what Holets did.

As he put it, “This guy wasn’t just taking a call, he was changing everybody’s life around him...It’s so unselfish. I was just humbled.”

Edison wrote a memo nominating Holets for outstanding service for the city of Albuquerque, but felt that didn’t suffice. It’s his job to reward his officers and encourage them to do the right thing, and so Edison signed Holets up to do an interview for CNN’s “Beyond the Call of Duty” series without telling him.

Holets was born and raised in Albuquerque and joined the city’s police department in 2011. He and his wife already had four young children before bringing Hope into their lives.

The couple had wanted to adopt a year or two down the road, and so when Holets approached his wife while on duty that day in September to break the news to her, Rebecca’s jaw dropped.

She was shocked but very excited.

Holets also quietly helped Crystal and her partner find the right rehabilitation center and gave them a tablet computer so they could receive photos of Hope over email. Thanks to his involvement with Hopes birth mom, Crystal was also put on the path to sobriety.

There are many stories like his of officers who go above and beyond the call of duty. Glen Buratti is a little boy who is autistic who in 2015 invited his class to a birthday party but no one came. He tried to hide his feelings but when his mom saw how he was doing, she posted on a Facebook group from her town about it, and all kinds of people came; the police flew in a helicopter to fly over the little boys house for a half hour and the police sent over officers and a canine unit. In Kentucky an officer helped a shoplifter who was fallen on hard times and stole baby formula, buying that man formula himself. And you might not know the name of Officer Jeremy Henwood, but he was killed in San Diego back in 2011, his last act minutes prior was to buy a child food while buying his own dinner.

There are many stories like these from people of all walks of life, and what they share in common is that many people in a world that can be filled with so many images of evil and people making bad decisions and sometimes devoid of hope, instead chose to fill it with love, which is what the Trinity comes down to. Father, Son and Spirit, united together in love; the Father and Son sharing a mutual perfect love, the Spirit being the outpouring of that love.

And this is where you and I are called to emulate that. But doing this takes work. It's not just about doing a good deed here and there; it's about making this love a way of life in all that we do. And for that to happen requires constant effort and learning.

For one, it means loving the law. In the first reading, Moses goes up the mountain with the stone tablets. Why is he doing that? Well you might remember from the famous scene in The Ten Commandments the original tablets Moses has he throws into the golden calf because he's so enraged that people are violating the laws of God and the covenant. So he goes back up after being summoned by God with the new set. All of us, like the ancient Israelites with the calf, can drift from the law, but we need the law.

We've seen in recent days what can happen when people ignore laws and chaos results. But the same is true in our lives too. There can be anarchy in our souls when sin takes over. So this is why we need to look at our lives and be honest about what it is we are battling rather than ignore it, and take the steps towards learning how to follow the law, rather than ignore it. Some of us battle sins of the flesh; gossip; racism; indifference; greed; bitterness; or treat family members with cruelty. If we aren't careful, sins become part of who we are. As such we want to move from it by learning how to follow the laws God has given us for our benefit so we can become better people.

Second, mercy. Moses goes up the mountain but not to get more tablets. Rather to get clarity from Yahweh that the Lord is slow to anger and rich in kindness and fidelity. This is seen most clearly in the gift of the Son as we hear in the Gospel, given to us so that those who believe in him might not perish, but have eternal life. Officer Holets has a job; to enforce the law. But he also chose to give Crystal that mercy that God speaks of by helping her into a recovery program. His mercy and love helped her to move past the shame she was experiencing. So how do you experience that with God? Has your image of God grown over the years to see God as this; to realize that you don't have to do things to receive mercy, but that you and I

are God's beloved. His love for us is unconditional, unchanging and absolute. God's love for us is based on who God is, namely rich in mercy and kindness. It's important to take the time to remember how much God loves and cares for you by looking at a cross, or going to confession. Once we look at God's law and say "here's where I want to change," remember God is there to help you, so come to know him. If you are struggling with believing and experiencing that you are a beloved child of God and loved unconditionally, with perseverance ask God to reveal His love for you. If you are aimless and not sure of where to go in life, surrender your life to Jesus and commit to following Him, He will show you the way. If you are scared or anxiety ridden or need strength for your vocation, turn to the Holy Spirit who will give you strength.

Third, look deep inside ourselves. Once we know the law and do an examination of conscience, what can sometimes crop up is an awareness of the sins of omission that we might have, the sins that are missing. Take racism. A few years ago in a homily I shared the story of Fr. Augustus Tolton, who ministered in Chicago and Quincy, Illinois. He grew up in Quincy, Illinois just after the Civil War ended. As the only black child at an all-white Catholic school, other parents threatened to take their kids out,

and a rock was thrown threw the rectory window with a petition to the bishop sent to have the priest who allowed him there in the school removed. He was targeted by racist kids, learning racism from their parents and others as we are not born racist, at the school as well. But he kept growing in his faith, in part due to people standing up against racism like a feisty Irish priest, Fr. McGirr, who challenged his flock with “if you did it to the lest of my brethren you did it to me” and that God would punish racism. That priest helped him get into seminary at a time when Catholic seminaries were reluctant to accept a black man. He’d go to Rome for study, and came back to the US when some wanted him to go to Africa, but a cardinal said “America has been called the most enlightened nation in the world. We shall see whether it deserves that honor. If the United States has never before seen a black priest, it must see one now.” It wasn’t easy. He went back to Quincy and one of his brother priests at a neighboring parish called him the n word when referring to “that” priest at the other parish. But he responded with love; eventually going to Chicago to help bring hope to the African American community where he started building a church and ministering to the poorest people in the city. What his story goes to show you is here’s this man, in the midst of God’s church, but there is disunity in the body because people saw him for the color of his skin first, the same

people who were at Mass every week and considered themselves good and faithful Christians. Earlier this week, the United States Bishops said in part of a statement that “we should not let it be said that George Floyd died for no reason. We should honor the sacrifice of his life by removing racism and hate from our hearts and renewing our commitment to fulfill our nation’s sacred promise - to be a beloved community of life, liberty and equality for all.” We don’t know if racism was involved in the Floyd case; it may be more a matter of an evil criminal act of one human being against another. But we do know that racism still exists in our world, as does hate. Archbishop Emeritus’ Flynn’s letter on this sums it up well, as often being hidden in our hearts. We can lump people together based on race; we can hate people based on their political viewpoints. Sadly there are some who hate based on race or religion or on what people do because they wear a police uniform, or are an elected official from one party or the other. We’ve even seen the tragedy of the riots following the death of Mr. Floyd in how so much destruction was caused, but also hate directed at people, especially police by the rioters. I think this gives us an opportunity to get introspective. You can’t control a feeling, but you can control what you do with it. If there are shadows of racism in our souls, we need to acknowledge them and pray to overcome them. And we need to also

understand the other person better to be a person of empathy knowing what they go through, or why they believe as they do. What is it like for victims of racism, or what caused a person to think as they do politically or fearful of a police officer or someone who looks different than they do or thinks different, or what caused a person to hate. Sometimes as the cross shows us, hate is the response to love. But Jesus loved anyway. And as hard as it can be to love others, we need to open our hearts and see what groups of people we aren't loving as we should, and try grow in tolerance and understanding.

Finally, we reveal the Trinity through our actions. Officer Holets and so many others so often do that going above and beyond the call of duty to truly protect and serve our communities. But so too do people from all walks of life. And this is more important now than ever as people struggle with seeing hope in the world. Evil obscures the face of God; but love triumphs on Good Friday, and it continues to do so in this world when we make the choice to be people who make a difference. So many in the world do not know God because no one has shown to them who God is. And before we get into talking about the theology behind Father, Son and Spirit, it begins as Mother Teresa began her ministry in the streets: through actions of love and mercy. From listening to others, to helping those in

need, to giving people the gift of time, each one of us through our actions have the power to reveal who God is.

In this world sometimes it's hard to see past things like riots, virus impacts, anger, divisions and seemingly perpetual bad news that gets thrown at us. Indeed, the reality is there will always be evil. There will be another incident like George Floyd's tragic death. There will be another cleric who chooses evil and abuses. People will be abused in families today in our world. People will hate because of race, politics and religion. People will hurt one another. That is the reality of sin. But the more important reality is what God has done for us - the God who is love who has created us, redeemed us, and continues to give us strength and his love, always there. So in a world with such pain, let's never forget how unconditionally our God is in love with us, and remember within each of us is the power to reveal that Triune love, a love that an officer gave one day when he saw not a heroin addict committing a crime, but a fellow human being in need and chose to do something about it, just as God did when He sent the Son. Evil is strong, but love is so much stronger - so let's open our eyes to see that, and realize within us all is the power to bring that love of Father, Son and Spirit into the lives of the people God sends us.

