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1st of the Finest

Thousands mourn in first service for a lost NYPD officer

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New York City on Friday began the "sad and difficult process," in the words of Mayor Rudolph Giuliani, of saying goodbye to the 23 police officers lost in the World Trade Center attacks.

The first farewell was for Officer Vincent G. Danz at St. Kilian Roman Catholic Church of Farmingdale, where traffic did not move until early afternoon as thousands of city police officers lined Conklin Avenue outside the church for a quarter of a mile.

In a last-minute cell phone call to his wife, Angela, on Sept. 11, Danz left the following message: "Hon, it's 9:50 and I'm at the World Trade Center. I'm up in the building. Say a prayer that we get some of these people out. I'm OK but say a prayer for me. I love you."

Danz, 38, the father of three young girls – Winifred, Emily and Abigail – was one of 14 officers from the elite Emergency Service Unit who perished while helping others escape from the Trade Center towers.

Funerals for two other officers, Santos Valentin and Glen Pettit, will be Saturday in Brentwood and Sayville, respectively. On Monday there will be a funeral for Officer Ronald Kloepfer in Franklin Square.

Giuliani, accompanied by Police Commissioner Bernard Kerik and



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First Deputy Commissioner Joseph Dunne, walked down Conklin Avenue at 11 a.m. Friday toward St. Kilian's. They stood silently outside the church, their hands clasped in front of them, surrounded by a sea of uniformed officers. From the other end of Conklin Avenue could be heard the muffled sounds of the Emerald Society Pipe Band's drums as they approached from the west.

In his homily, Danz's first cousin Jim Murphy, a former FBI agent and lay deacon, said Danz loved his job and loved his family. "He loved his girls," Murphy said.

In 1986, Murphy said, Danz's sister Winifred Danz, and her husband, Thomas Fehmel, were murdered in their home in Southampton during a robbery. Danz's parents, Murphy said, "publicly forgave the murderer."

"Is it any wonder," he asked, "that Vinny was the person he was?"

While there must be justice, Murphy continued, referring to the terrorists who caused Danz's death, "there must never be vengeance."

Next, Giuliani, who was applauded as he rose to speak, said, "Since Sept. 11, the world has come to know what New Yorkers already knew — that we have the best police department in the whole world. It is a shame it took a tragedy like this to get to know this. They know it now."

Dunne told the congregation Danz was supposed to be working a later shift the day of the attacks but switched tours so he could attend engineering school. Dunne said Danz called his wife, knowing she would be walking with girlfriends, to leave his final message.

" 'I am in this awful place helping people,' " Dunne quoted Danz as saying. " 'Pray for them, pray for me.' "

Giuliani said that while the World Trade Center attacks may have been the greatest loss the city has suffered, the city's rescue effort saved more than 25,000 lives and was "the greatest rescue mission ever accomplished."

The mayor said the concept of justice belonged in a "court of law."

"The question here," the mayor said, "is self-defense. I think we have to defend ourselves. We have to defend ourselves against this happening again . . . against another attack in five or 10 years."

"Our goal has to be the same goal as we had in the Second World War. It has to be unconditional victory over terrorists and terrorism," Giuliani said. "We have to protect ourselves. If left alone they will do it again."





Newsday Photos / Alejandro Villa

New York City police officers, top, enter St. Kilian Roman Catholic Church in Farmingdale on Friday for the memorial Mass for Officer Vincent Danz, above, missing since the Sept. 11 World Trade Center attacks. At left, a police officer tries to contain his emotions as he listens to Angela Danz read a letter she wrote to her missing husband.

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