

A Reflection of the life of Fr. Mark Schneider Christmas morning 2009

In the 1990 movie, *Glory*, about the first all black 54th Massachusetts Volunteer Infantry in the Civil War, there is a moving scene that takes place on the evening before the men will charge a very formidable fort, knowing they will take heavy casualties (it is estimated that they experienced 50% casualties). In this scene as the men are singing and praying to lift their spirits and preparing for the inevitable danger they will face in the morning, the commander of this group of men points to the man who has volunteered to carry the flag at the extremely dangerous head of the charging unit and says to the rest of the men, *"If this man shall fall, who will lift the flag and carry on?"*

This flag bearer played a critical role in this drama of life and death. He was the symbolic and tangible sign of the efforts to accomplish a challenging mission. He chose to place himself at the very vulnerable front of the action and constantly became an inspiration and motivation to all who would follow him. Everyone knew that the person in this position could easily fall in performing this essential leadership role. Yet everyone also knew that if the flag bearer fell, then it would be incumbent on someone else in the ranks to step forward and to assume this leadership role.

What a great analogy about the life and death of our friend and brother, Mark Schneider. The banner that he chose to raise and carry touched so many people in the world around him. Through his efforts, for example, seven years to establish the KAIROS prison ministry within the Ohio prison system, he was a tremendous instrument in the hands of Our Lord. His flag bearing role invited hundreds of men and women to share their lives through prison ministry and touched the hearts of thousands of incarcerated men and women, giving them hope and reconnecting them with the grace of Our Lord.

Now, maybe each of us is not called to be a major leader as was Fr. Mark, but during this season of Christ's coming among us, we can all be uplifted by Fr. Mark's flag bearing role and remember that when asked, *"If this man will fall, who will lift the flag and carry on?"*, May each of us, in our own personal way, make extra efforts to carry the flag of Christ more boldly in the prison ministry started by our fallen brother Fr. Mark Schneider. May he rest in eternal peace with Our Father and continue to lead us in prayer with on behalf of our efforts in the ministry he helped establish.

Bob Ivory
SOCF Ministry team
Christmas morning 2009