Opinion
NCR Voices



A sign for 37-year-old Alex Pretti, who was fatally shot by a U.S. Border Patrol officer earlier in the day, is displayed during a vigil Jan. 24 in Minneapolis. (AP/Adam Gray)



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Alex Pretti was only 37 years old when he saw a U.S Border Patrol agent throw a woman to the ground and moved to place himself between the officer and the woman. Seconds later, he was shot multiple times by the officer and his colleagues. Christians should remember Pretti's name and the look of his face, remember that he was a human being, made in the image and likeness of God.

In a video, Pretti stands before the body of Terrance Lee Randolph, a veteran who had just died in the ICU where he worked. Pretti reads the man's name, his date of birth and his date of death. Pretti recalls the man's service and the freedom his service, and that of others, procured. He finishes by saying the nurses and doctors surrounding the body offer their "honor and gratitude" to Randolph. It is a humanizing moment, and a patriotic one.

Renee Nicole Good was also 37 years old when she was shot and killed by a U.S. Customs and Immigration Enforcement agent. She was a mother of three children who had just dropped off her youngest at school when she was shot. Different ICE officers were shouting conflicting things at her as she tried to pull away. One agent apparently thought she was trying to run him over and, instead of stepping aside, he shot her in the face.

Liam Canejo Ramos is only 5 years old. He was abducted by ICE agents with his father, Adrian Alexander Conejo Arias. The government alleges Liam's dad was in the country illegally but according to their lawyer, they entered legally and have been trying to complete the asylum process. Liam and his dad were transferred to a detention center in Texas the same day as they were abducted. Liam's story fell off the front pages and the top of the news when Pretti was shot two days later, but we must remember him.

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Homeland Security Secretary Kristi Noem labeled Pretti a "domestic terrorist," before anyone had begun an investigation into the circumstances of his shooting. President Donald Trump accused Good of "violently, willfully, and viciously" trying to run over an ICE agent, again, before any investigation had been conducted.

In a pastoral letter released on Jan. 26, Seattle Archbishop Paul Etienne wrote: "Catholic Social Teaching begins with the unshakeable truth that every human being is created in the image and likeness of God. This fundamental dignity forms the bedrock of all moral life and a just society." That truth is "unshakeable" in its claim on the Christian conscience, but it was most definitely shaken experientially by the events in Minneapolis. We must work to protect human dignity and, when we are unable to protect that dignity, we must acknowledge the sin and crime of denying dignity, of killing innocents, of abducting children.

Our nation was not founded on Catholic principles, but it was informed by Christian ethical ideas and by liberalism's own, very different but equally comprehensive, recognition of human dignity as the heart of a just society. How, then, do we recall our nation to its own best traditions, to its truest self?

To change hearts, we need to lead not only with our principles but with the faces of these victims of the Trump administration's evil disregard of the dignity of migrants and those who defend them. This reminds us all that moral considerations must determine political ones, and that for Christians, our moral claims are rooted in a dogmatic claim: The human person is made in the image and likeness of God.

We must put faces on the facts of the ICE crisis and those faces belong to Alex Pretti honoring a veteran, Renee Good dropping off her kid at school and a bewildered Liam Canejo Ramos being walked to a stranger's SUV.

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