Opinion

Guest Voices



People visit a makeshift memorial on Jan. 31, 2026, in Minneapolis for 37-year-old Alex Pretti, who was fatally shot by federal officers. (AP/Ryan Murphy)



Joseph J. Tyson

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It is hard to watch the video footage of Alex Pretti's death. We see him attempt to record federal immigration enforcement agents on his mobile phone. We see him try to help two women pushed to the ground by the officers. Then we see a brutal horror unfold.

Jesus said to tend the sick, visit the prisoner, welcome the stranger. He said whatever we do to the most vulnerable of our people, we do to him. Whom do we see as Alex Pretti is shot to death?

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Whom do we see in the photo of Liam Ramos, a 5-year-old Minneapolis resident detained along with his father? There are no photos or videos for most of the 3,800 children that the Department of Homeland Security has detained, according to the Marshall Project. Who will bear witness for them? We saw the image of federal agents forcing an elderly U.S. citizen into the snow barely clothed, after reportedly beating his door down without a warrant and holding him at gunpoint. A citizen! What is happening when no one is recording?

We were told that the government's mass deportation effort would focus on deporting violent criminals. So why is Immigration and Customs Enforcement targeting churches and school pickups? Why is ICE arresting people at immigration court hearings before their cases have even been heard? These people are following the law to earn legal status. In fact, the percentage of detainees with violent criminal records is around 5% or 7%, according to recent analyses from the Cato Institute and The New York Times, respectively.

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The government is also revoking the legal status of thousands of people so they can be pushed out of our country. This may impact more than 1.5 million immigrants. The federal government is ripping families apart and abusing human dignity.

This is an affront to our moral consciences as Catholic bishops. "We oppose the indiscriminate mass deportation of people," the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops said. "We pray for an end to dehumanizing rhetoric and violence." In a sermon last September, Cardinal Robert McElroy of the Archdiocese of Washington clearly named what is happening: a "governmental assault designed to produce fear and terror among millions of men and women."

The governmental assault is not just happening in Los Angeles and Chicago. It is happening all across our country, including in my rural diocese of central Washington state.

We would never know about these assaults on our morality if not for witnesses like Alex Pretti. His example reminds me to check on parishioners and neighbors. I still do not know the whereabouts of my parishioner José López, who was mistakenly apprehended in September. How hard this long silence must be for his loved ones.

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I thank God for witnesses. It can be dangerous to shine a light on that which the powerful would hide. The Greek word "martyr" literally means "witness." The tragic deaths of witnesses like Alex Pretti and Renee Good reveal the darkness around them.

If you are understandably afraid to bear physical witness to those suffering from ICE's tactics, stay informed. Pray with your voice and your feet. This week, Congress is considering more funding for the Department of Homeland Security after ICE's budget was increased tenfold last year. I echo my brother bishop, Cardinal Joseph Tobin of Newark, New Jersey, who recently spoke to grassroots leaders: "Will you

contact your congressional representatives? We ask them, for the love of God and the love of human beings — which can't be separated — to vote against renewing funding for such a lawless organization."

Though we are not all called to be martyrs, we are all called to be witnesses. If you are a person of faith, it is more important than ever to view politics through the lens of that faith, and not the other way around.

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This story appears in the **Immigration Protests in Minneapolis** feature series. View the full series.