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Long Line of Blue, Mourning the First of Two Slain Comrades

At Funeral for Officer Rafael Ramos, N.Y.P.D.'s Solidarity Is on Display

By MARC SANTORA DEC. 26, 2014

In an overwhelming display of solidarity and sorrow, tens of thousands of police officers from across the country joined with the New York Police Department on Saturday to pay their respects to a fallen officer.

They came for the funeral of Officer Rafael Ramos, who was gunned down along with his partner, Officer Wenjian Liu, as the two men sat in their patrol car on a Brooklyn street, targeted because of the badges they wore.

Every police funeral is rich with symbolism and solemnity. But the farewell on Saturday carried a deeper resonance, coming at a time of heightened tension between the police and communities across the nation.

For the police, it was moment to reaffirm their bond of blue.

“When an assassin’s bullet targeted two officers, it targeted this city and it touched the soul of an entire nation,” said Vice President Joseph R. Biden Jr., who spoke at the funeral along with Gov. Andrew M. Cuomo, Mayor Bill de Blasio and Police Commissioner William J. Bratton.

Mr. Biden was voicing a sentiment that has coursed through the city over the last several days and that was palpable outside the Christ Tabernacle Church in Queens, where Officer Ramos was celebrated and mourned on Saturday morning.

In the weeks and days before the shooting, protesters took to the streets in cities across the country to denounce the criminal justice system as unfair to blacks.

But often the police themselves were the target of their rage, and many officers have expressed a sense of feeling besieged.

Rudy Zotter, 51, now retired, worked for years in the Special Victims Unit and said he had been to 88 funerals dating to 1985.

“This funeral is different from all funerals I’ve been to because right now there’s a public outcry in law enforcement,” Mr. Zotter said.

“You have to come out to support people in a very bad time,” Mr. Zotter said. “With the beatings law enforcement has taken all over the country, this is a way of everyone showing support in a friendly way.”

Speaking inside the church, Mr. Cuomo said that he watched the recent protests and saw “people hurling insults” directly in the face of the police officers — but that the police did their jobs, no matter how vicious or personal the invective.

“Every New Yorker stands with you today,” Mr. Cuomo said. In recent days, a number of threats against police officers have been reported, and Mr. Cuomo said, “No group is above the law, no intimidation, no politics will ever change that.”

Mayor de Blasio, who spoke after Mr. Cuomo, praised Officer Ramos and all those who choose to serve the city in uniform.

“Our hearts are aching today,” he said. “New York City has lost a hero.”

But even as he spoke, his words relayed on large-screen televisions outside, some officers displayed their discontent.

A few officers, several blocks from the church, turned their backs as the mayor spoke. Asked whether they faced away because the mayor was speaking, one of them slowly nodded his head yes.

The funeral was a stark coda to a wrenching week for the Police Department.

The man who killed the officers, Ismaaiyl Brinsley, had said on social media that he had intended to kill police officers, drawing apparent inspiration from the ongoing protests against the police. He took his own life minutes later.

After the killings, the political fallout was immediate and intense. The already strained relationship between Mr. de Blasio and the department grew even worse, with the head of a police union even accusing him of having blood on his hands. When Mr. de Blasio arrived at the funeral, there was a scattering of boos and one officer held up a sign calling for him to resign.

In recent days, Mr. de Blasio has tried to heal the rift, but it remains to be seen whether he can win the trust of many in the department.

As Christmas Day approached, Mr. de Blasio called on protesters to put down their signs until after the officers could be mourned — a call that went unheeded by some.

On Wednesday there was a minute of silence at 2:47 p.m. to mark the time the

two officers were killed.

That night, buildings across the city briefly dimmed their lights in tribute.

Services for Officer Liu, 32, have been delayed until members of his family can make arrangements to travel from their home in China. He was known to celebrate his faith privately, and friends of the family said such a public funeral could be difficult.

On Friday, the official ceremonies began with the wake for Officer Ramos, a 40-year-old married father of two.

As his son Justin spoke at the wake, his words played on giant television screens outside the church so that the thousands who came to pay tribute could hear.

“Dad, I’m forever grateful of the sacrifices you made to provide for me and Jaden,” he said, referring to his younger brother.

“My dad would have been there for everyone, and to see so many people here for him is a testament to who he is as a person. It has been so helpful during this time.”

On Saturday, Mr. Bratton sought to comfort the boys.

“We are your family now, just as we were your dad’s,” he said.

Sandra E. Garcia, Elizabeth A. Harris and N.R. Kleinfield contributed reporting.