

A Solemn Day. 9.11.11. Fr. Hugh. STG.

Today is a solemn day, when we remember and honor the lives that were taken in that heinous attack, ten years ago this morning.

Many people are appalled, as am I, at the restrictions placed on the Ground Zero memorial observations, restrictions that have marginalized fire-fighters, marginalized police, marginalized other first responders and, have marginalized God.

It is a propitious thing therefore that September 11th, on this tenth anniversary, should fall on a Sunday; so

that churches across the country may honor the fallen, honor the survivors and invoke the providence of God.

In my parish ten years ago, as in many, if not all churches throughout the land, we witnessed a sudden compulsive turning to the church, immediately following that morning of mass-murder.

People found solace and comfort in the church. Yet, sadly, for many people that was short-lived.

Just a few short months later the nationwide spiritual search fizzled out.

Similarly the attacks brought forth a wave of patriotism. Some who had always been patriotic found their convictions recharged.

Some who had not previously been particularly patriotic discovered a new surge of patriotism.

Yet there are clear messages being put out that we should now downplay this event and just put it in the past.

A sad statistic was recently reported that 59% of people said that they hardly ever give the events of 9\11 a thought.

Yet everyone I know stands firmly in the conviction that "we shall never forget."

Even the recent execution of Osama Bin Laden, while certainly a victory for justice, can no more be said to put an end to terrorism, than the 1993

execution of Columbian drug lord Pablo Escobar put an end to international drug trafficking.

In these times we need more than ever to rally for the good of our country.

We need to remember with honor those who died, those who served, and those who lost someone they loved.

In these times we need more than ever to call upon God and renew our trust in Him.

For the rest of our lives every one of us will be able to answer the question:

'Where were you when you heard the news on September 11, 2001?'

It's not hard to cast your mind back exactly ten years ago. You can recall how you felt and what you thought.

What I want to share with you today is what I felt and thought.

So the rest of what I am about to say is unapologetically what I wrote that night to say at the service of grief and remembrance that we held in our parish.

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First one plane, then another, and hell erupted in New York City.

And that was only the beginning.

It was all too much to take in.

It looked like a scene from any one of a dozen suspenseful blockbuster movies.

But it wasn't. - It isn't. It was real.

It is horribly real.

Seasoned, hardened reporters spoke, choking on their emotions with tear-filled eyes and cracking voices.

The tragic human stories that are coming to light underscore the brutal realities of this evil invasion.

Unquestionably the worst terrorist attack ever, it has rightly been called an act of war.

It has rightly been called an act of cowardice.

Some people who are of an age to recall Pearl Harbor have a sickening feeling of déjà vu – An, “Oh God, here we go again.”

Some have said it is worse than Pearl Harbor because of the focus on attacking civilians.

We were all shocked at the catastrophe of Oklahoma City and never imagined something ten times worse than that would ever happen.

Pearl Harbor, Oklahoma City and Lockerbie, all rolled into one.

Who knows how many thousands of people dead, murdered, in one evil hour on Tuesday morning?

How do we feel? How should we respond?

What can be said at this time?

Perhaps you've avoided watching TV because you could not bear to watch any more.

Perhaps, like me, you've been watching more news than at any other time of your life.

Perhaps you have tried desperately to make sense of this.

But there is no sense to be made of it.

It is senseless, cruel and barbaric.

Oh yes, we will go on and we'll become able to philosophize about it, to somehow include it in the breadth of life's experience, as a dark chapter in this vale of tears.

But it is too early to achieve that kind of philosophical equanimity.

Before we can arrive at that I think we need to express our rage, our grief, and our pain.

There is a time for grief and a time for rage.

There is a time for comfort and a time for healing.

There is a time for forgiveness, but it is not yet!

Forgiveness too early, without due reflection is cheap and phony.

What would you like to say to the perpetrators of this horror?

If I can keep my language clean enough to say this in church I would like to say to them:

“You are the worst kind of mass murderer.

You are despicable. You are diabolical.

When you gloated at the pictures of people burning screaming, jumping, being crushed and dying, remember that well, for what you enjoyed watching for a few hours is a preview of your eternal destiny.

“You are wrong. You are evil.

And you will not get away with it.

If you wanted us to pay attention to your cause, whatever it is, you just lost our vote.

Your cause is destroyed with the towers.

You were wrong too in your assessment of the American people and our international allies.

You hurt us terribly, but you have no victory.

You have hurt our body, but you have not harmed our spirit. The people of the United States are not that easily intimidated.”

Some people may wonder:

Where was God when this happened?

How could He allow such a thing?

Let me tell you that God was in those few extra precious minutes that the buildings remained standing, permitting many people to escape.

God was in the courageous few who caused their plane to crash in a field in Pennsylvania away from their target.

God was in the hearts of the brave firefighters, police and rescue workers who displayed such selfless courage and heroism.

God was in friends and strangers who helped one another in extraordinary ways.

God is in the compassion of all decent people whose hearts are broken by this massive suffering.

God is in the phenomenal outpouring of generosity that has already begun to sweep through our nation.

We grieve. The pain of the loss of several thousand people pushes us relentlessly into grief.

The pain of tens of thousands of their friends and family is a heavy burden of grief.

Most, probably all of us, have swung wildly between shocked disbelief, to righteous anger; to being suddenly tearful, or, to just being numb.

We have been touched in our souls by the painful poignant stories of people's anguish.

We need to grieve.

Because it is only through grieving that we will pass through to the other side of pain.

Jesus said: "Blessed are those who mourn for they will be comforted."

But what can we do?

We can pray.

Do not now underestimate the value of prayer.

We can give of our resources to help.

There are so many people in need – Family survivors, who lost not only their loved ones, but also their means of providing for their children.

We have been horribly reminded that this life could come to an end at any moment without warning.

What can we do?

We can vow here and now, in the sight of God, that we will never take for granted the people we love.

We will not let time go by without expressing our love and appreciation for them.

We can vow to ourselves that we will not take our blessings for granted, that we will daily give thanks

for our freedoms, for democracy, for religious liberty.

If any positive lesson can be pulled out of this horrendous event, it must be to do with the brevity of life; the value of life; and the need to be right with God.

If this doesn't make you realize the urgency of getting right with God, I don't know what would.

Have you found that some things which seemed important on the day before, are not so important now?

We should reevaluate what is of true and lasting importance in our lives and put those things into their right place.

In the fullness of time, after the dust really has settled and justice has been served, and we have not forgotten, but lived the lessons we have learned, then we may even be able to forgive.

To their enormous credit, millions of survivors of World War II and other comparable atrocities, have, through the grace of God, been able to forgive.

Then we will remember in our souls a powerful prophecy - a vision of heaven. It is my granddaughter's favorite verse of Scripture. "And He shall wipe away every tear from our eyes. There

will be no more death, or mourning, or crying, or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.”

[Revelation 21:4]