



Twenty-Fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time September 11, 2011 A

Reflections As We Remember 9/11

The following are some of the reflections that are posted on the website of the United States Catholic Conference of Bishops (USCCB). They are not in any particular order.

Beverly and Thomas Burnett, Sr. remember their son Tommy

Tommy Burnett was one of the heroes of the airplane revolt against the hijackers of Flight 93, which crashed near Shanksville, Pennsylvania.

Ten years ago we suffered the most devastating loss imaginable — the death of our son, Tommy. It is still impossible to describe our grief. Tommy did not die in vain. While we would give anything to have him back, his final actions in life provide us with immeasurable hope and inspiration, a gift to a nation facing new and unprecedented challenges.

Tom was a hero on Flight 93. He and his fellow passengers were drafted unknowingly as the first citizen-soldiers in the war on terrorism. From the four telephone conversations Tom had with his wife Deena, he calmly assessed the life-or-death options they faced, developed a well-organized plan with his fellow passengers, and then acted.

Tom's last words were, "We're going to do something." And they did. Thanks to the extraordinary decisiveness, leadership and character he and his fellow passengers showed, thousands of lives were spared in Washington. Little more than one hour into the war, America won its first battle against terrorism.

Tom was a man of faith, integrity, wisdom, wit, compassion and courage. He was born prematurely on May 29, 1963, at St. Mary's Hospital. He had to fight for his life in the beginning and he fought for his life on September 11, 2001. Tom was baptized, made his first Communion and was confirmed at St. Edward's Church, Bloomington, Minnesota. He attended Mass regularly, prayed and believed in prayers by others. He had a close relationship with the sisters known as Poor Clares, who received a letter from him on September 11, 2001.

Tom was an exceptional husband, father, son, brother

and uncle. Even with a busy schedule and living on the West coast, he did whatever he could to minimize the distance. The frequent trips to Minnesota, phone calls and emails kept him close to his family in Minnesota.

Tom's keen wit and humor could lighten any situation. The impromptu impersonations of Bill Murray were a classic family favorite. Every Christmas, Tom would insist the family watch "It's a Wonderful Life."

In August 2001, Tom traveled to Minnesota. We were fortunate to have the time together as a family. That weekend, Tom truly touched each of us with his presence. He spent time at his farm with his father, dined with the entire family, cheered for his niece at a soccer game, attended church with his mother and shared a glass of wine, and sang and danced to a Neil Diamond program on cable. These recent memories live on in our hearts.

Tom was an avid reader, and family members could always expect his gifts would be books.

Tom passionately studied the lives of many great figures in history. One of his favorites was Winston Churchill. Tom appreciated his quote: "I am ready to meet my maker. Whether my maker is prepared for the great ordeal of meeting me is another matter."

Tom had just read a biography of John Adams, who once said, "A taste for literature and a turn for business, united in the same person, never fails to make a great man."

We hope every American finds his or her own way to contribute to the war on terrorism — and to act with the courage Tom showed from this day forward. "We're going to do something."

On this tenth anniversary, let us all pledge to "do something," something hopeful, something kind, something bold, and something right.

Fr. Bruce Nieli, C.S.P., writes:

I was recruited to bless the bodies of victims recovered from a buried stairwell in the aftermath of the horrific tragedy of September 11, 2001. My "recruitment" was purely the work of the Holy Spirit, since I was simply in New York City on the eve of a flight to Greece and Turkey for a pilgrimage I was to lead "in the footsteps of Saint Paul."

I found myself at St. Francis of Assisi Church in midtown Manhattan, which was the home of Franciscan Father Mychal Judge, the heroic chaplain of the New York City Fire Department who gave his life on 9-11. It was there that I felt the call to go to Ground Zero, where I was directed to get a hard hat and mask and help out in that apocalyptic setting. The Fire Department, so largely Catholic, needed a priest.

I was ordained in 1973, the very year that the Twin Towers went up. To see them come down was like seeing a part of my life come down. My heart was filled with intense anger at the terrorists. Yet the words that came out of my mouth as I blessed my first body with Mayor Giuliani and other ministers present expressed just the opposite sentiment: "Lord, make us all instruments of your peace; where there is hatred, let us sow love...."

The Holy Spirit, I'm certain through the intercession of St. Francis and Father Judge, turned my bitterness into forgiveness.

How in awe I was seeing the crowds along the New York streets praying and saluting as we wheeled the American flag-draped bodies to the makeshift morgue. It was to see firsthand an America united.

At Ground Zero two fellow ministers pointed out two things I will never forget. The rector of St. Paul's Chapel at the base of Ground Zero, mentioned that one of the earliest paintings of the great seal of the United States, directly over George Washington's pew, with America's original motto, "*e pluribus unum*" ("out of many, one"), written on the ribbon carried by the bald eagle, was intact. Miraculously, it was not destroyed by the implosions of the Twin Towers. The other was the cross at Ground Zero that the Peace Officer Ministries had helped to plant as a reminder of Christ's presence in the depths of tragedy.

Since my sojourn at Ground Zero I have focused my preaching and mission on connecting through the power of the Holy Spirit the cross of Christ, so central to our Catholic faith, with the culture of America.

In this way we can all build a nation under God truly "*e pluribus unum*."

Fr. Anthony Sherman writes:

One of the transforming experiences of these sad days was that everyone really had to ask themselves what was important in life. Certainly the normal things that we get so excited by were all cast aside by the magnitude of what had happened. The preciousness and also the precarious and vulnerable nature of the fundamental gift of life burned its way into the depth of our souls.

I suppose for this reason, it took me quite some time before I could visit Ground Zero and look down at it from the street. Even more traumatic for me was when we made the pre-visit for Pope Benedict's projected visit. Cardinal Egan told me about his own experiences of 9/11, and we both realized how we had been transformed by that day. But it was with some trepidation that I stood at Ground Zero as Pope Benedict lit a candle and then knelt in quiet prayer for a few moments. He was surrounded by so many that had lost loved ones. His presence, however, gradually brought a sense of peace that was hard to describe. The wounds were still there but a true healing process had begun.

A lesson learned from the whole experience was the realization that we ought not to cling to too much, although that is a constant struggle. In a moment, everything in our lives can be thrown up in the air and without a clear sense of what can truly survive. The way forward can be almost impossible.

Finally, 9/11 led us all into the very depths of the mysteries of human suffering, death and resurrection. We discovered that we cannot obtain nor find all the answers to the atrocities we experienced. Yet with God's grace we also experienced the height of human sacrifice and the ability of our brothers and sisters to manifest heroic love. Ultimately we will have the answer to our questions and the reconciliation of all the forces of those days when we ourselves enter into the mysterious inner life of God's self. Only there will the mysteries of the 9/11 experience be revealed.

A Muslim serves her country:

The attacks on September 11, 2001 turned my life into a whirlwind of activities and intense soul searching to better understand how people of my faith could declare war on my country all in the name of my religion, Islam. As a Muslim and a military officer, my world changed for the worse because we were at war, and the enemy caused a distrust of the global Muslim community and scrutiny of American Muslims serving in the Armed Forces and in government agencies.

At this point in my military career, I had served over 20 years of active and reserve duty and was never ever so uncertain of my role in the military or in society.

Although, I was born a Muslim, my level of practice was limited until I became the youth leader within my Muslim community. During this time, I discovered my calling to become a chaplain as a way to serve my Muslim and military communities with the same career field rather than have two distinct career fields. Needless to say, my chaplaincy education began with great urgency because it was my second day at Hartford Seminary when 9/11 occurred. This was the first day

that I felt any degree of fear since I came to the United States in 1972. I immediately knew the life I once had with all its freedoms was gone with uncertainty and unease as my new paradigm.

I was immediately confronted with the demands of becoming a representative for Muslims to help others better understand Islam and help explain why Muslims attacked America in the name of Islam. Despite the many Americans who reached out to help Muslims allay their panic and fear, the rhetoric of the media seemed to undo all this good will with their beating of the drums of war and unrest.

I lost hope in dreaming of a brighter future because of the sense of uncertainty of what could happen to Muslims. It was reported that many Muslims were taken to prison without anyone knowing where they were and not being afforded the right of counsel. I wondered if we all would be rounded up and placed into camps like the Japanese people and be treated as second-class citizens. Or would I have to leave the military because I couldn't be trusted? It was surreal living in the United States with the perceived negative media coverage against Muslims, the hostilities from fellow Americans and the flag waving to determine if we were patriotic Americans. A military colleague asked me why I wasn't waving a flag in my car and I responded, isn't it enough of a symbol for me to be wearing my military uniform in defense of my country?

I had the dual life experiences of being celebrated and despised depending upon which uniform I wore. When I wore my military uniform, people shook my hand and thanked me for my service to my country, and when I wore my Muslim garb with my head cover or hijab, people stared at me with comments like "go back to your country," which made me very sad and angry at the same time. At times, I wanted to whip out my military ID and say "please don't judge a book by its cover, because you don't know who is defending your freedoms." However, as a chaplain in training, I said nothing and walked away. My greatest lesson and gift came from the way people treated me, and I began loving people for the sake of God as the effects of shock and fear overtook our country. I realized the best thing I could do was to believe in myself, support people and continuously call upon God to help us restore the hope.

On the tenth anniversary of 9/11, as I reflect on the changes that have occurred in my life, I feel the resiliency of my faith as the biggest strength in helping build bridges of understanding with my fellow Americans. I have persevered with patience, loving kindness, non-judgment and taken a stand to live in a pluralistic America that has liberty and justice for all no matter what race, gender, religion or personal affiliation.

Do Muslims believe in the same God as Christians?

The above question is sometimes asked and some Christians do not think that Muslims believe in the same God as we do. Vatican II's *Decree on Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions* states:

The Church has also a high regard for the Muslims. They worship God, who is one, living and subsistent, merciful and almighty, the Creator of heaven and earth, who has also spoken to humanity. They endeavor to submit themselves without reserve to the hidden decrees of God, just as Abraham submitted himself to God's plan, to whose faith Muslims eagerly link their own.

Although not acknowledging him as God, they venerate Jesus as a prophet; his virgin Mother they also honor, and even at times devoutly invoke. Further, they await the Day of Judgment and the reward of God following the resurrection of the dead. For this reason they highly esteem an upright life and worship God, especially by way of prayer, alms, deeds and fasting. (Art 3)

A Challenging Prayer

Today's first reading and Gospel speak about the central importance of forgiveness in the life of a disciple of Jesus. The following prayer was found in the Ravensbrück concentration Camp in Germany.

"Lord, remember not only the men and women of good will, but also those of ill will. But do not remember all the suffering they have inflicted upon us. Remember rather the fruits we brought, thanks to this suffering: our comradeship, our loyalty, our humility, the courage, the generosity, the greatness of heart that has grown out of this. And when they come to judgment let all the fruits we have borne be their forgiveness."

Have a blessed week,

Le Saran

We remember all those lost at the Twin Towers, the Pentagon, and Flight 93 that went down in Shanksville, PA.

