

September 11, 2001 Reflections from the Popes

As we mark this solemn anniversary of 25 years, please take time to pray, remember, and resolve to never forget what happened; those who gave their lives in service to another; those who lost their lives by only going about their schedule; and how we are called to be the followers of Jesus today. May God Bless America and guide us closer to him.

Saint John Paul II (at his regular Audience on 9/12/2001; after communicating the day before with the US President and US Ambassador): *"I cannot begin this audience without expressing my profound sorrow at the terrorist attacks which yesterday brought death and destruction to America, causing thousands of victims and injuring countless people.*

"To the president of the United States and to all American citizens, I express my heartfelt sorrow. In the face of such unspeakable horror, we cannot but be deeply disturbed. I add my voice to all the voices raised in these hours to express indignant condemnation, and I strongly reiterate that the ways of violence will never lead to genuine solutions to humanity's problems.

"Yesterday was a dark day in the history of humanity, a terrible affront to human dignity. After receiving the news, I followed with intense concern the developing situation, with heartfelt prayers to the Lord.

"How is it possible to commit acts of such savage cruelty? The human heart has depths from which schemes of unheard-of ferocity sometimes emerge, capable of destroying in a moment the normal daily life of a people. But faith comes to our aid at these times when words seem to fail. Christ's word is the only one that can give a response to the questions which trouble our spirit. Even if the force of darkness appear to prevail, those who believe in God know that evil and death do not have the final say.

"Christian hope is based on this truth; at this time our prayerful trust draws strength from it.

Pope Benedict XVI: (on April 20, 2008 during his Apostolic Journey to the United States/United Nations. Below is the text of the Prayer he offered at Ground Zero in NYC; he did not offer a formal speech beyond the prayer)

O God of love, compassion, and healing,
look on us, people of many different faiths and traditions,
who gather today at this site,
the scene of incredible violence and pain.
We ask you in your goodness
to give eternal light and peace
to all who died here—
the heroic first-responders:
our fire fighters, police officers,
emergency service workers, and Port Authority personnel,
along with all the innocent men and women
who were victims of this tragedy
simply because their work or service
brought them here on September 11, 2001.
We ask you, in your compassion
to bring healing to those
who, because of their presence here that day,
suffer from injuries and illness.
Heal, too, the pain of still-grieving families
and all who lost loved ones in this tragedy.
Give them strength to continue their lives with courage and hope.

"With deeply felt sympathy I address myself to the beloved people of the United States in this moment of distress and consternation, when the courage of so many men and women of goodwill is being sorely tested. In a special way I reach out to the families of the dead and the injured and assure them of my spiritual closeness. I entrust to the mercy of the Most High the helpless victims of this tragedy, for whom I offered Mass this morning invoking upon them eternal rest. May God give courage to the survivors; may he sustain the rescue workers and the many volunteers who are presently making an enormous effort to cope with such an immense emergency.

"I ask you, dear brothers and sisters, to join me in prayer for them. Let us beg the Lord that the spiral of hatred and violence will not prevail. May the Blessed Virgin, Mother of Mercy, fill the hearts of all with wise thoughts and peaceful intentions.

"Today, my heartfelt sympathy is with the American people, subjected yesterday to inhuman terrorist attacks, which have taken the lives of thousands of innocent human beings and caused unspeakable sorrow in the hearts of all men and women of goodwill. Yesterday was indeed a dark day in our history, an appalling offence against peace, a terrible assault against human dignity. "I invite you all to join me in commending the victims of this shocking tragedy to Almighty God's eternal love. Let us implore his comfort upon the injured, the families involved, all who are doing their utmost to rescue survivors and help those affected. I ask God to grant the American people the strength and courage they need at this time of sorrow and trial.

We are mindful as well
of those who suffered death, injury, and loss
on the same day at the Pentagon and in Shanksville, Pennsylvania.
Our hearts are one with theirs
as our prayer embraces their pain and suffering.
God of peace, bring your peace to our violent world:
peace in the hearts of all men and women
and peace among the nations of the earth.
Turn to your way of love
those whose hearts and minds
are consumed with hatred.

God of understanding,
overwhelmed by the magnitude of this tragedy,
we seek your light and guidance
as we confront such terrible events.
Grant that those whose lives were spared
may live so that the lives lost here
may not have been lost in vain.
Comfort and console us,
strengthen us in hope,
and give us the wisdom and courage
to work tirelessly for a world
where true peace and love reign
among nations and in the hearts of all.

Pope Francis: *(During an Interreligious meeting at Ground Zero Memorial, New York, he offered the following words on Friday, September 25, 2015)*

I feel many different emotions standing here at Ground Zero, where thousands of lives were taken in a senseless act of destruction. Here grief is palpable. The water we see flowing towards that empty pit reminds us of all those lives which fell prey to those who think that destruction, tearing down, is the only way to settle conflicts. It is the silent cry of those who were victims of a mindset which knows only violence, hatred and revenge. A mindset which can only cause pain, suffering, destruction and tears.

The flowing water is also a symbol of our tears. Tears at so much devastation and ruin, past and present. This is a place where we shed tears, we weep out of a sense of helplessness in the face of injustice, murder, and the failure to settle conflicts through dialogue. Here we mourn the wrongful and senseless loss of innocent lives because of the inability to find solutions which respect the common good. This flowing water reminds us of yesterday's tears, but also of all the tears still being shed today.

A few moments ago I met some of the families of the fallen first responders. Meeting them made me see once again how acts of destruction are never impersonal, abstract or merely material. They always have a face, a concrete story, names. In those family members, we see the face of pain, a pain which still touches us and cries out to heaven.

At the same time, those family members showed me the other face of this attack, the other face of their grief: the power of love and remembrance. A remembrance that does not leave us empty and withdrawn. The name of so many loved ones are written around the towers' footprints. We can see them, we can touch them, and we can never forget them.

Here, amid pain and grief, we also have a palpable sense of the heroic goodness which people are capable of, those hidden reserves of strength from which we can draw. In the depths of pain and suffering, you also witnessed the heights of generosity and service. Hands reached out, lives were given. In a metropolis which might seem impersonal, faceless, lonely, you demonstrated the powerful solidarity born of mutual support, love and self-sacrifice. No one

thought about race, nationality, neighborhoods, religion or politics. It was all about solidarity, meeting immediate needs, brotherhood. It was about being brothers and sisters. New York City firemen walked into the crumbling towers, with no concern for their own wellbeing. Many succumbed; their sacrifice enabled great numbers to be saved. This place of death became a place of life too, a place of saved lives, a hymn to the triumph of life over the prophets of destruction and death, to goodness over evil, to reconciliation and unity over hatred and division.

In this place of sorrow and remembrance I am filled with hope, as I have the opportunity to join with leaders representing the many religious traditions which enrich the life of this great city. I trust that our presence together will be a powerful sign of our shared desire to be a force for reconciliation, peace and justice in this community and throughout the world. For all our differences and disagreements, we can experience a world of peace. In opposing every attempt to create a rigid uniformity, we can and must build unity on the basis of our diversity of languages, cultures and religions, and lift our voices against everything which would stand in the way of such unity.

Together we are called to say "no" to every attempt to impose uniformity and "yes" to a diversity accepted and reconciled. This can only happen if we uproot from our hearts all feelings of hatred, vengeance and resentment. We know that that is only possible as a gift from heaven. Here, in this place of remembrance, I would ask everyone together, each in his or her own way, to spend a moment in silence and prayer. Let us implore from on high the gift of commitment to the cause of peace. Peace in our homes, our families, our schools and our communities. Peace in all those places where war never seems to end. Peace for those faces which have known nothing but pain. Peace throughout this world which God has given us as the home of all and a home for all. Simply PEACE. Let us pray in silence.

(a moment of silence)

In this way, the lives of our dear ones will not be lives which will one day be forgotten. Instead, they will be present whenever we strive to be prophets not of tearing down but of building up, prophets of reconciliation, prophets of peace.

Many of us remember where we were. The challenge of this remembrance is to go forward as we were on September 12, 2001. We can only do that by recognize our dependence on the Lord for ourselves, our families, our church, our nation, and our world. May these words from our Popes continue to inspire us to never forget, remember the fallen, and go forward with resolve. Please put this reflection somewhere where you can remember to reference it as a reminder of who we are called to be.

In the Lord,
Fr. Jason Feigh
Pastor