

September 11th Reminds Us of the Power of Good in All of Us

Saturday, our nation marked 20 years since the terrorist attacks of 9/11.

For me, that was the first week of seminary. I remember first seeing some of the footage on one of the TVs in a hall at Saint Thomas, and then seeing the rest of the day's events unfold on TV and online.

However, for all of the horror that day, I remember also seeing some images of hope. You might remember the Cross at Ground Zero, where there were two beams that formed a cross. I was able to see these close up a few years ago when visiting the 9/11 Memorial Museum, an incredibly powerful place.

It was a reminder to me that while evil is allowed to happen, God is not absent from our world at all. As we all know, he was in the police officers, the fire fighters, and in the many people who became heroes that day. Much like God, who comforts us and is present in our suffering, our Lord also lives through you and me. And there were so many examples that day of that occurring.

In a homily at daily Mass a few years back, I shared the story of two marines who were featured in an article running in "Business Insider" which I've attached below:

While the planes were hitting the World Trade Center, 27-year-old Jason Thomas was dropping off his daughter to his mother in Long Island.

When Thomas heard what had transpired, he changed into the Marine Corps uniform he had sitting in his trunk — he was a former sergeant who had been out of the Corps for a year — and sped toward Manhattan.

Someone needed help. It didn't matter who," Thomas told AP. I didn't even have a plan. But I have all this training as a Marine, and all I could think was, My city is in need."

Around the same time in Wilton, Connecticut, Dave Karnes was working in his office at Deloitte watching the attack unfold on TV.

We're at war," the former Marine staff sergeant said to his colleagues, before telling his boss he might not be back for a while, according to Slate. He went and got a haircut, changed into his Marine uniform, and drove toward New York City at 120 miles per hour.

Once both Marines reached the collapsed towers — the site now covered in ash and debris — they began searching for survivors, but first, they found each other. They had little gear with them besides flashlights and a military entrenching tool, AP reported. Along with other first responders, the pair climbed over the dangerous field of metal, concrete, and dust, calling out, United States Marines! If you can hear us, yell or tap!

When they reached a depression in the rubble of what had been the south tower, he said, I thought I heard someone. ... So I yelled down and they replied back that they were New York Port Authority police officers. They asked us not to leave them.” Karnes told Thomas to get to a high point to direct rescuers to the site, then called his wife and sister on his cell phone and told them to phone and give the New York police his location.

The two officers, William Jimeno and John McLoughlin, were on the main concourse between the towers when the South Tower began to fall, but made it into a freight elevator before the collapse. They were alive but seriously injured, trapped approximately 20 feet below the surface.

According to USA Today, once they heard the voices of the Marines, Jimeno began shouting the code for officer down: 8-13! 8-13!” After they were located amid the unstable mountain of debris, it took rescue workers roughly three hours to dig out Jimeno, and another eight to reach McLoughlin, who was buried further down.

An exhausted Thomas, who never gave his first name, left the site after Jimeno was rescued, but returned to Ground Zero for the next 2 1/2 weeks to help. His identity was a mystery until after Oliver Stone’s 2006 film “World Trade Center” chronicled the rescue of the officers, and Thomas emerged from the shadows.

Karnes also left after Jimeno came up, but helped at the site for another nine days. After he returned to Connecticut, he went to his reserve center and reenlisted, and later served two tours of duty in Iraq.

Each Mass we celebrate we call a “sacrifice,” for it makes present again the sacrifice Jesus offered for us on Good Friday. Jesus invites us to follow Him, and doing that also entails sacrificing for one another out of love.

And when we look back on the sacrifices of people, whether it was the two marines Jason Thomas and David Karnes, or the countless other people who were first responders that day and who worked tirelessly in the days that followed, we see how good triumphed over evil. This requires sacrifice though. A willingness to suffer for others.

The challenge for us is to always see the bigger picture and the potential, and to see what good can do. Hopefully we will not face such a horrific situation in our lives, but through the sacrifices we make, there is so much good we too can bring into the world. Giving of our time to serve others can make such a big difference in this world.

Indeed, so many are willing to do just that, which is what gives me hope for our world and for all of humanity. It shouldn’t take a major tragedy though for us to spring into action, so may we daily look for ways that we can truly serve one another and bring God’s love into this world.

Since 9/11, I have read many stories like those of the two marines, and daily see so many good things going on in this world from the events of our own parish, people trying to help and build one another up as we try to emerge from the pandemic. God sees the good in us all, which is why He created us, and died for us. Let's respond to that by bringing to completion His love in the world, never forgetting our sacrifices can bring about such good to make this world a better place where God's love is seen and known.

God bless,

Fr. Paul