

**TO  
REMEMBER  
WELL**

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*A Pastoral Letter*

*by Bishop Paul S. Loverde  
on the Fifth Anniversary of  
September 11, 2001*

## *“Deep calls unto deep”*

As we near the fifth anniversary of September 11, 2001, I join fellow Americans and especially Catholics of the Diocese of Arlington in recalling both the darkness of that day and the outpouring of grace which followed. Who can forget the horror of that morning? The memories I have – the visible concern and stress experienced by the faculty, staff and students at Paul VI High School where I was celebrating the Opening School Masses, the thick black smoke covering the sky above the nearby Pentagon, the wail of sirens and the thunder of fighter jets – will never leave me. Neither will the tolling of so many church bells during those initial hours which called the faithful to prayer – for the fallen and their families, our country, our armed forces and our enemies.

“Deep calls to deep” (Ps. 42:7), and our country’s great losses called forth from us deeper questions about our priorities. I was not alone in observing an almost immediate change in our homes, churches and communities. Some called it heroism – others hope, the spirit of sacrifice or the rebirth of volunteerism. Common courtesies such as the opening of a door or checking up on an elderly neighbor reentered the fabric of our days. Everywhere it seemed that people struggled to focus their lives on what mattered most.

This reordering of our lives and the search for an answer to suffering led us to a time of grace. As Saint Paul wrote, “Where sin increased, grace abounded all the more (Romans 5:20).” In civilian, defense and military communities throughout our diocese, my brother priests and I noted this reexamination of priorities in concrete ways: packed pews, a return to the sacraments, lines at the confessional, attention to



stewardship and a more regular and faithful practice of the faith.

On the occasion of this five-year anniversary, when the grace and heroism of those first days may be subtly fading from memory, I invite our community of faith wholeheartedly to remember the fallen, to reexamine our response to terrorism, and finally, to refocus on what matters most.

### *Remembering the Fallen*

The events of our own “Ground Zero” here in Northern Virginia are more than mere images for us – they took place on familiar soil. In those grave initial hours, our priests – signs of God’s presence, consoled the survivors and the grief-stricken at the Pentagon, and administered sacraments to the wounded and dying in area hospitals; our Catholic school teachers comforted students; we gathered to pray at countless Masses and prayer services; we attended funerals of loved ones, neighbors and colleagues. For many, it was the proximity to the terrorist acts that resulted in our deeper reliance on the Lord.

How can we ever forget those who gave their lives that day or in the following years, or those who now tirelessly serve our country in positions of great risk? Is it possible that after such loss, such heroism, such focus, we could ever become complacent? Our response to these questions should be unequivocal: We are called to be a “people of memory.”

The summit of our faith is centered on memory. Let us consider the celebration of the Eucharistic Sacrifice, the Mass, when we relive our Lord’s death and resurrection and recall “our brothers and sisters who have gone before us, marked with the sign



of peace.” By sacrificing His life for us, His sufferings are forever united to our own. Even as we continue to rebuild our lives and our country, we must uphold the memory of those men and women who suffered and died – and their friends and families – in prayer. This unity through memory, part and parcel of our faith, will protect us from complacency. In this we imitate our Heavenly Father, who never forgets us. As it is written, “Even if these may forget, yet I will not forget you” (cf. Is. 49:15).

### ***The Catholic Response to Terrorism***

In the immediate wake of the Pentagon attack, one priest of our diocese who was in the vicinity went directly to the scene and prayed with and for those affected. He told each of them, “Jesus is with you.” In recalling those moments, he speaks of how he repeatedly heard the response: “Yes!” Those who suffered realized that Christ was with them, He did not abandon His people in this time of need.

In turn, the American people imitated Christ’s presence through an outpouring of generosity in the midst of the valley of the shadow of death. Our response was first and foremost concrete. Among countless examples, I want to highlight the following from our own diocese:

- Many parishioners donated time and resources to assist families who lost loved ones.
- St. Thomas More Cathedral School established the Guardian Angel program to pair children of military families with civilian families to establish comfort and safety in times of need.



- Our tuition assistance program offered increased help to military families attending diocesan schools.
- Catholic Relief Services instituted a number of programs to allocate the generous financial donations contributed by members of the diocese.
- Catholic Charities of the Diocese of Arlington helped more than 3,000 people adversely impacted by the September 11<sup>th</sup> events.

Yet as we approach the fifth anniversary of September 11<sup>th</sup>, we pause, and consider whether our response – as Catholics – has been sufficient. For together with providing material assistance, we know that our response must be one which mirrors the words of Pope John Paul II, a survivor of the Second World War and a witness of the Holocaust, who wrote, “My reasoned conviction...is that the shattered order cannot be fully restored except by a response that combines justice with forgiveness” (2002 World Day of Peace). To those who think forgiveness and justice are irreconcilable, he continued, “[F]orgiveness is the opposite of resentment and revenge, not of justice. In fact, true peace is ‘the work of justice’” (Is. 32:17).

As we seek true peace by our work for justice, we must continually ask ourselves, “How are we to respond to the terrorist attacks against our country?” By forming our consciences so that our response is in accord with the teachings of Jesus Christ. By fervently seeking in prayer the Lord’s guidance and wisdom in all of our actions as a nation and as individuals. By examining our behavior in regard to those of the Islamic faith, especially those who live in our area, to see if we are acting out of vengeance or out of justice. By continuing



to insist that the criteria for a just war are met. And by doing everything in our power to avoid the taking of innocent human life in military undertakings aimed at eliminating the scourge of terrorism.

Five years ago, we witnessed the terrorist attacks against the sanctity of human life and the common good, and we must defend these goods in a manner which is consistent with the teachings of Jesus Christ. Appeasement has never shown itself to be the friend of peace; therefore, we must act in a just manner to confront the evil of terrorism so that the world may be a safe and peaceful place for generations to come. We must be convinced that the power of good can overcome evil in each and every human heart and nation.

Revenge and resentment are deeply entrenched human emotions which we have all experienced. Yet as Catholics, we know a higher road. We are called to respond to terrorism by imitating our Lord, the loving author of peace and justice. For Jesus said, “Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you” (Mt. 5:44).

Respect – what Pope Benedict XVI recently referred to as “mutual respect” – is also integral to our response. In the diverse counties of Northern Virginia, we are fortunate to witness daily encouraging examples of this healthy mutual awareness of one another. Muslim students attend our diocesan schools; our Resettlement Office, with its parish volunteer network, annually assists numerous Muslims from around the world as they settle in Virginia. Our diocesan Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs Commission is fostering ties with the local Muslim community through regular dialogue.

Pope Benedict XVI recently reiterated the Catholic Church’s commitment to inter-



religious dialogue. In so doing, he called on Christians to “cultivate a style of dialogue open to the religious question, without failing to present to the interlocutors the Christian proposal consistent with her own identity.”<sup>1</sup> This “style of dialogue” supports the sanctity and dignity of every human person, made in the image and likeness of God. Our respect is always for the dignity of the person. There is no dignity in terrorism. Together with forgiveness, justice, love, and mutual respect, this dialogue too can and should characterize our ongoing, Catholic response to terrorism.

### ***Honoring the Sacrifices, Today and Tomorrow***

Our nation is at war – a reality not lost upon the men and women of Northern Virginia, home to military bases, civilian support, defense industry and the Pentagon. On the occasion of this remembrance of tragedy, I wish to thank the members of our Armed Services currently serving our country throughout the world. Your commitment to protecting this great nation in so many ways mirrors the selfless sacrifice of our Savior, who died for us. As your brothers and sisters, we cannot fail to recognize your generosity.

Eager for the day when you will return home to us, we hold you in our hearts and prayers. Together with pride, honor, and sacrifice, your commitment to duty has undoubtedly brought suffering and loneliness. You know in a special way the words of Saint Paul: “For I am sure that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able



to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 8:38-39).

What should we do to commemorate this anniversary, when the sacrifices of the fallen five years ago seem to have drifted from our minds, even as the daily sacrifices of those in our Armed Services continue?

First, we must turn to prayer. Through prayer, we are truly able to unite our sufferings with Christ and commend the safety of our loved ones to Him. In the face of tragedy, it is often difficult to find the words to speak. Let us turn to Mary in the Sorrowful Mysteries of the Rosary and to Jesus in the beautiful devotion of Divine Mercy. The Chaplet of Divine Mercy, in recognition of Christ’s suffering, asks for the mercy the world so desperately needs: “For the sake of His sorrowful Passion, have mercy on us and on the whole world.” Finally, seek the solace of Christ in the Blessed Sacrament; He is waiting for you.

Out of the depths of personal prayer come great fruits. As shepherd of this diocese, I ask that each parish facilitate a deepening of personal and communal prayer by commemorating the anniversary through:

- A **prayer service** or **Memorial Mass** to commend to God the past and present sacrifices of the fallen, those in our Armed Services, and to pray for our enemies.
- Regular inclusion throughout the year of prayers for our Armed Services, our nation, and lasting peace in the **General Intercessions**.

To all Catholics and persons of good will, I ask that you use this national day of reflection as a time to refocus on how you might better love and serve your neighbor. Sadly, the sharp increase in volunteer service



immediately following September 11<sup>th</sup> has not been sustained. I encourage everyone to consider – together with a deepened return to prayer and the sacraments – concrete ways we might renew that heightened spirit of service and generosity we knew in the days and weeks immediately following September 11, 2001. Through prayer and service, we will be able to demonstrate charity towards our neighbors and to forgive our enemies.

### *Conclusion*

I urge the faithful not to forget the events of September 11, 2001, and to pray that we might rediscover the spirit of unity, sacrifice, and prayer which marked the immediate aftermath, while at the same time seeking from God an end to terrorism and violent death throughout the world. May the God of mercy grant fullness of life in His eternal presence to all those who died on September 11<sup>th</sup> and give all of us who remain the support of His strengthening grace as we journey homeward to Him!

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1 Pope Benedict XVI, Address to the Plenary Assembly of the Pontifical Council for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant People, May 15, 2006.

