

## “THE DAY THAT CHANGED AMERICA”: TWENTY YEARS AFTER 9/11

Like so many, I recall with precision the moment I first heard about the **World Trade Center**. At 7:46 a.m. (CDT), American Airlines Flight 11 crashed into floors 93 through 99 of the North Tower. Just before beginning first-hour class (I was serving as chaplain at a Catholic school) I heard that a plane (a small private plane?) had crashed into one of the towers. I heard about the **second plane** only after I had **finished** teaching that religion class. It was all word of mouth—an English teacher informed me of the second plane, a jet! Suddenly, it was obvious that this was no accident. Only a **handful** of classrooms were equipped with televisions in those days. Computer **livestreaming** in 2001? Not a chance. The debut of 3G wireless was still a month away (much less 5G), there was no Xbox (Nov. 2001), Skype (2003), Facebook (2004), Twitter (2006) or iPhones (2007). Ah, the **good ‘ole days** of technology!

As second hour was my free period, I immediately “snuck” back to the priest residence on campus. At 8:59 a.m., I watched in **horror** as the South Tower (after burning for an hour) collapsed in just twelve seconds. I quickly returned to school after just a few minutes and found the headmaster. He said, “Father, we have to do something. Some of these students have fathers who are pilots—we need some spiritual **solace**.” I replied, “I teach Senior Campus Ministry next hour...give me that class period and we will prepare to celebrate an all-school Mass during 4th period.” With his blessing in tow, I walked into class and made an intense appeal. “Gentlemen, I **need your help** right **now**. Our school needs to come together and pray. We have 45 minutes to plan, set-up and execute an all-school Mass. We need music, lectors, Communion distributors. Will you help me?” Everyone was **all in!** They immediately sprang into action.

While I can’t recall what I said in my off-the-cuff homily, I do know that this **hastily arranged** Mass was among the **most solemn** I have ever celebrated as a priest. This weekend’s **20th anniversary** provides the occasion for reflection on what our country learned from 9/11 and our continued response. Gratefully, while our nation has been safe these past twenty years, the **geo-political landscape** is significantly more **complicated** today. Our nation has undergone such dramatic changes and there are clearly struggles with how to respond. Facile answers to complicated questions of **immigration reform** or **counter terrorism** measures are simply not possible. We need **reasonable** and **measured** solutions. This is the core of what faithful members of the laity do—bringing their faith and convictions into contemporary society. We do not run from the world, but **engage** it, in hopes that we can **facilitate** peace and prosperity, offering a brighter and more secure future for our nation.

Twenty years ago, **2,977 souls** perished in New York City, Washington, DC and outside of Shanksville, Pennsylvania, among whom were 343 firefighters and paramedics, 23 NYPD officers, 37 Port Authority officers. In Washington D.C., **184 perished** and near Shanksville PA **40 passengers** and crew members died aboard United Flight 93. Bloomington native **Thomas Burnett Jr.** was among those who stormed the cockpit to prevent yet another landmark from being attacked. On August 26, 2021, thirteen brave U.S. soldiers lost their lives while trying to evacuate Americans and our allies amidst chaotic conditions. Most were too young to have any recollection of 9/11. It was gut-wrenching to watch the caskets solemnly arrive at Dover Air Force Base. Many are justifiably angry at how the Afghanistan withdrawal unfolded. Still, nothing good will emerge if we allow **hatred** to take root in our hearts.

Our nation is not unique in our historic struggles to love one’s neighbor. Catholics were the victims

of vicious **anti-Catholic bias** in the 1850's that is well-documented. It led in large part to the formation of the Catholic School system, because it was increasingly difficult for Catholic children to attend public schools. In the space of fifty years, the Catholic population in the United States suddenly transformed into an incredibly **diverse mass** of urban and rural **immigrants** who hailed from many countries, spoke different languages, held varying degrees of social status, each emphasizing aspects of their Catholic heritage. Catholic culture remained strong, vibrant and clear. Despite significant differences between Catholics and Protestants over matters of doctrine, there remained a **predominant culture** that was both God-fearing and one that stressed traditional family values. This is clearly **no longer** the case. So, what is our response?

May the Lord **protect us** from allowing any of our anger or fears, however real and even justified, to cloud our better judgment. As we remain ever vigilant in the face of **evil and hatred**, may we truly pray for the grace of forgiveness towards all who have hurt us, just as our Lord has taught us. May God bless our families and our nation. *E Pluribus Unum*. Out of many, one. May we **never forget** all who lost their lives in an instant and those who rushed to save and protect them. America is good, as are the vast majority of people in the world. We must **never forget**, but let us also seek to love selflessly, treating one another with dignity and respect.

- Following the **science**? In a 2012 Vice-Presidential debate, Joe Biden stated, "Life begins at conception, that's the Church's judgment. I accept it in my personal life." (Actually, it is **primarily** a scientific, not doctrinal question.) But when asked just last week about a new Texas abortion-related law, he replied, "I respect those who believe life begins at the moment of conception. I don't agree, but I respect that. I'm not going to impose that on people." Don't agree? Mr. President, what's changed in nine years?
- Last call! Religious Education classes for our children will begin this Wednesday, September 15th. There is a [link to register](#) for Wednesday evening classes on the parish website. Initially, classes will be held in our campus building at 244 Dayton Ave., as the Cathedral lower level will be used for Synod Small Groups.
- If you are considering becoming Catholic, **RCIA** (Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults) is for you. We have a solid line-up of teachers who will **articulate the riches** of our Catholic faith. Adult Catholics who are unconfirmed are also encouraged to join. Learning is a lifelong endeavor.
- *Do-re-mi-fa-so-la-ti-do!* Last week, our Cathedral Choir rehearsed for the first time since March 2020! Deo Gratias. There is plenty of time for new singers to join. Prayerfully consider putting your own gifts to greater use by joining our choir. Rehearsals take place on Wednesday evenings at 7:00 p.m.
- We welcome **Bishop Andrew Cozzens** as celebrant for today's 5:00 p.m. Mass, along with guests of the Catholic Community Foundation's **Legacy Society**. Each of our guests has included legacy gifts in their estate planning benefitting the Church in some way.
- Electronic Funds Transfer (EFT) provides steady support to the Cathedral. As you prayerfully consider your stewardship, this is a great option.

Sincerely in Christ,

Fr. John L. Ubel,  
Rector