

Mourning in Ordinary Times

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By Lucia A. Silecchia

“Blessed are they who mourn, for they shall be comforted.”

This season, with somber hearts, we mark 25 years since achingly bright September skies were filled with the horrors of an evil still incomprehensible.

For so many years, whenever I took the train from Washington back to New York, the Twin Towers were the first sign in the distance to tell me I was almost home. New York City’s skyline without them still startles me after all these years.

In far greater losses than steel and stone, my high school, parish and neighborhood in Queens were home to those who never came home that day. In Washington, I shared a University family and a parish with those who perished at the Pentagon. When I learned that the last flight could have been bound for the Capitol, above the subway where I was commuting in the last innocent moments of that day, I wondered whether I might owe my own life to the heroism of those whose lives ended in Shanksville, Pennsylvania.

Now, that dark day lies a quarter of a century ago. Most of my students were not alive that day. If they were, most were blessed with such youth that they would have no memories of it. My prayer for these generations that follow us is that they will never know a day like that one, when the evil that mankind is capable of plays out in real time before them.

As years go by, it becomes ever easier to view the events of that day as historical affairs, to be studied with the mind but no longer felt with the heart. Those of us who recall that day owe a sacred obligation to those before us and those who come after us, to remember those whose lives ended that morning, and in the tragic aftermath of that morning. Sometimes, when losses are so many, and the list of those who perished is so long, we can lose sight of the individual people who were lost.

Those who died that day were living the ordinary times so often taken for granted. The police officers, firefighters, first responders, chaplains and members of the military were doing what they do each and every day – ready to give up their lives for others. The airline pilots and flight crews were engaged in the awesome responsibilities they have when, around the clock and around the world, passengers entrust their lives to them.

The thousands who went to work for the last time that day were parents, seeking only to earn a living and return home to the embrace of their children. They were older workers, laboring in the last year or two of their careers, anticipating the family times they thought lay ahead. They were young people, the same ages as my students, starting

their first jobs in the hopes of a bright future. They were those working hard at the top rungs of the ladder of success, and they were those working difficult, minimum wage jobs so that their children would not have to do the same. They were those who were on flights for the myriad reasons we travel, and those who were where they were that day through seemingly inexplicable happenstance.

They were newlyweds in the springtime of new love, and those who cherished the spouse whose hand they had held for decades in sickness and health and in good times and bad. They were women carrying their children within them, in eager anticipation of holding newborns in their arms within a few short months or weeks. They were friends making plans to be with friends to enjoy those happy bonds of affection.

All were those for whom the day began with no hint of what was to come. While some were or became well known in the aftermath of that day, most lived the quiet hopes and dreams of ordinary lives.

In the holy fragility of life, each of those thousands of our sisters and brothers had a unique place in the world that no one else could fill.

Since that day, their loved ones have mourned for them even as life resumed, never the same. So many of us remember the images of those who were lost as they were that day. But their loved ones lost all the days since then. They lost all the joys, sorrows, hopes, dreams, good times and hard times that would have filled these past 25 years. These 9,125 days. These 219,000 hours.

This year, although 25 years have passed, there are so many for whom grief is still fresh. Whatever else we might do this September 11, let us take some time to pray in the early hours of the day, when we recall what happened that morning a quarter of a century ago.

With gratitude for all whose heroism brought light to a dark day and showed the world a glimpse of the face of God.

With hope for all those lost that day, that their souls and the souls of all the faithful departed, through the mercy of God, rest in peace.

And with love for all whose hearts still grieve. May God comfort them as they mourn their beloved and ache for so many lost moments of ordinary time.

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