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Mass of Hope and Remembrance
World Trade Center, Pentagon and Shanksville Terrorist Attacks
Wednesday, September 11, 2002
Our Lady of Perpetual Help Church - Kansas City, Missouri

Millions of words have been written about September 11, 2001, and millions more will be written in the years ahead. Thousands of images in explosive color have seared our senses again and again with numbing regularity before they coalesced into a morbid mound of dust and death. Oh, it was an ordinary day, but all agreed it was a beautiful morning. It was a wonderful day to be alive until evil came riding on wings of steel.

A year of days has passed, but it still hurts. So many people who never came home again — people who lived and were loved; people who laughed and cried and sometimes complained; people who kept photographs of their children on their desks or in their wallets; people who had plans for the weekend. They went to work and never came home again. And there were those who came to help. They didn't turn back. Duty called and in the avalanche of mutilated masonry and billowing smoke, they died side by side, close together as they had worked and joked for so many years. Danger they understood. It was their stock in trade. But this was different, and they were overwhelmed. They came to help and never returned.

And where, we may ask, is the greatest tragedy? Is it to be found beneath the smouldering mass of belching earth? Or in that terrible silence of absence, the essence of grief? Or in the burning desire for revenge? Or in the building of taller walls and the slamming of the gates and a retreat to the bunkers? Why? Why did Cain kill Abel?

And initially, we got angry with God — the God we conveniently created for the occasion, one who should have protected us, one who, King Kong-style, should have plucked those planes out of the sky. Oh, it is a natural reaction, perhaps, automatically inventing a scapegoat to create a fabric of justification for the unbearable. Evil thrives behind such facades.

This symptom of idolatry faded as we fell to our knees to discover, or maybe even to rediscover, that our God was always there, honoring the freedom he gave us to be an unwise people, to flirt with sin, to ignore him. The graciousness of an ever-forgiving God comforted us in our confusion. He convinced us that even in our brokenness we could reach out to others with love and care and consolation. And so, in his name, we did. Churches, synagogues, mosques were filled. Kitchen tables became altars of prayer for those who never came home again, and for those who waited for them until all hope died.

It was an extraordinary outpouring of what goodness can do.

My dear people, anniversaries tend to diminish after the first, and remembrance without resolution dissipates into sentimentality. To honor those who died and those whose lives were changed forever, can we do any more than to rediscover the obvious — that we should love

people more than things, that we should cherish our children more than our jobs, that we should share rather than hoard, that we should work for justice to ensure peace, that we should walk daily with our God.

Let us now join him on the road to Emmaus and recognize him in the breaking of the bread.

AMEN