

24th Sunday of the Year A September 11, 2011 – Fr. Gerald Haemmerle

This past Friday afternoon the St. Charles Grade School had a memorial service in honor of the 10th anniversary of 9/11. It was very well done, the children did most of the parts of it, they remembered those who had died in the terrorist attack, the fire fighters, police, and medical people who came to their aid, some of whom perished, and the military people who have given their lives for our country. The thought struck me that half of them were not even alive when this happened, and the other half probably do not remember it happening.

Those of us who are a little older or much older remember it very well. I was in my office at the Seminary when the first plane hit the World Trade Center, the secretary came in to tell me about it. From that point on we were all glued to the T.V., for the rest of the morning, much of the day, and over the weekend. The scenes were frightening, the pictures in our memories indelible. I remember that weekend, I was having masses at St. Mary's I Hyde Park, Cincinnati. The number of people that came to mass that weekend and the following weekends was amazing. The mood was both of fear and sadness. But I remember so many positive things. I remember hearing about all the heroes who came to assist on that day and the days that followed. I remember hearing about love, especially love of family as we listened to people saying good-bye to loved ones before dying that day. I remember hearing and seeing the patriotism in the days and weeks that followed, the unity and the resolve that was part of our country. It seemed that there were neither Democrats nor Republicans, but only Americans.

Where are we today, ten years later? Are we better off than we were in 2011? Have we maintained the good things that seemed to come out of that tragedy? I sometimes struggle to see it. All the people that were drawn to come to church, to turn to God and pray, are they still doing that? Our numbers would not reflect that. Do we only turn to God when we think we need him? Are we safer than we were? Homeland Security is in place, and Hussein and ben Laden are no longer a threat. But do we trust others, especially those who look a little different than us, as much as we used to? Are there any heroes out there? I believe there are, quiet, ordinary heroes who we take so much for granted. Is there still patriotism out there? We sometimes think that patriots are only those who agree with me. And unity, I don't see it at all. And resolve is only about my agenda.

Do the scripture readings have anything to say to us today? They are all about forgiveness. Peter asks our Lord how often he must forgive his brother, and proposes 7 times. And Jesus says, not 7 times but 77 times. There is never an end to how many times we must forgive. If we were to summarize the message of all of scripture, I think it would be "God so loved the world" and the greatest commandment is "Love God with all your heart, and your neighbor as yourself." The second most talked about point in the scriptures is "forgiveness." Love is impossible without forgiveness. We must forgive ourselves, we must forgive our loved ones, especially those we live with, we must forgive our neighbors, those we disagree, those who look differently than us, those who believe differently. Only then can we love them. Only then might we begin to have peace in the world.

I want to end with a prayer prayed by Pope Benedict at a prayer service at Ground Zero in 2008. This prayer will be passed out to all of you by the Knights of Columbus on your way out today.

God of peace, bring your peace to our violent world; peace in the hearts of all men and women and peace among the nations of the earth. Turn to your way of love those whose hearts and minds are consumed with hatred.

God of understanding, overwhelmed by the magnitude of this tragedy, we seek your light and guidance as we confront such terrible events. Grant that those whose lives were spared may live so that the lives lost. . . may not have been lost in vain. Comfort and console us, strengthen us in hope, and give us the wisdom and courage to work tirelessly for a world where true peace and love reign among nations and in the hearts of all.