

## Homily for September 11, 2011 – Fr. Tim Ralston

This weekend, we, as a nation, pause to remember the events of 9/11. We remember where we were and what we were doing when we first heard the news. We recall seeing the horrific images of the towers, the planes, the chaos. We think back to the various emotions and reactions we experienced as this unimaginable tragedy played out. Fear, shock, confusion, sadness, anger and many others. Out of all of these reactions though, the one I want to focus in on today is anger. And when I say anger, I'm including here those other things that often accompany anger, such as rage, hatred, holding grudges and wrath.

I want to examine the question of why we, as humans, so quickly experience anger when a tragedy like 9/11 happens. At first, this question may seem like it has a pretty obvious answer. It just makes sense to get angry when we see injustice carried out, or when we hear about these crimes against humanity. These actions are just so completely wrong that we can't help but get angry at those who commit them. It's only natural on our part. And there's a lot of truth in this. But there's also a little more to it than this, and this little more is greatly important.

For if we look more deeply at why we get so angry, so full of rage, and why we demand such quick justice at tragedies that come about by the actions of humans, then we can learn something about ourselves, and about human beings in general. I believe that the main reason we get so angry, is because we know deep down, maybe even subconsciously, that the human person deserves to be treated better than this. We know that human life is too valuable to be destroyed and annihilated by the actions of a group of terrorists who launched a surprise attack against us 10 years ago. The victims of 9/11, including the deceased and the injured, along with their families and friends deserved better than this.

The awareness of the dignity of the human person has been placed deep within us by our Heavenly Father. It's there, whether we always recognize it or not. But when a tragic event like this occurs, that results in suffering, in pain, and in death for so many people, this awareness wells up within us to the point that we can't ignore it anymore. This is why we are so moved and yes, so angry at times, when human lives are attacked like they were 10 years ago.

The awareness, then, of the dignity of the human person is a very good thing. The anger and the rage, though, that seem so natural, and at times unavoidable, are not compatible with the inherent dignity we have. For anger can lead us down the road of hatred, of vengeance, of irrationality, and of unforgiveness. And our inherent dignity, given to us by God Himself, demands better than this. Those who have died in tragic ways, and their loved ones who continue to grieve and mourn, deserve better than this. For they and us, all of us together, the living and the dead, deserve that we who call ourselves Christian, strive to bring God's peace and love to all of humanity and to this world, so full of violence and hate.

And that is why our readings today are so appropriate. They tell us how to do this. For as we think back to 10 years ago, and as we are reminded of that day that Pope John Paul II called "a dark day in our history, an appalling offence against peace, a terrible assault against human dignity," we may find we still have anger. We might be still holding on to our desire for vengeance.

But God is calling to us, through these readings, to offer mercy and forgiveness to others, including our enemies and our attackers, rather than hold on to grudges or allow anger to control our hearts. Rather, if we want peace to reign in the world, then peace must first take complete possession of our hearts. And this peace must come from God, the God Who created us, the God Whom we serve, the God of forgiveness and love.

This God is reaching out to us, with His hands extended, offering to give us that peace, that forgiveness and that love. He is offering to heal us of the anger that might still be in our hearts. But we will be unable to receive it if our hands remained clinched in anger towards others. God tells us in our first reading, "Could anyone nourish anger against another and expect healing from the Lord?" We can only receive God's mercy, if we first let go of the pain we feel and the grudge which we are carrying. If we do this, that mercy will overflow our hearts and souls, and we will find true peace.

As evil always does, the events of 9/11 threatened to rob us of God's peace by attacking human dignity and by tempting us to respond with anger and hatred. And even as we gather here together 10 years later, that threat of losing God's peace still remains. It's up to us to make sure that doesn't happen though. It's up to us to remind ourselves of the dignity of the human person, the dignity that we ourselves possess, and the dignity of all of those around us – friends, family, co-workers, neighbors, and yes, even enemies.

And as we make ourselves aware of the dignity the Father has given us, we realize that we, along with our brothers and sisters, are worth far more than violence, hatred and anger allow for. Jesus showed us this by dying a tragic death on the Cross for us. And, as we know, Jesus in the midst of His tragedy, begged forgiveness for His enemies; He begged forgiveness for us. "Father, forgive them, they know not what they do." May this prayer become ours as well.