Fifteen years ago, people throughout the nation flocked to churches on September 11 to pray and to put into God’s hands the senseless acts of the day. Each year since, we observe that day with prayer.

With September 11 falling on the Twenty-Fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time, pastoral ministers will be challenged with providing a balanced remembrance on an emotional day. All involved in the preparation of the liturgy will want to give careful thought to the options that can be utilized without turning Sunday Mass into an extended memorial service.

**A FOCUS ON MERCY**
The Scripture passages assigned to the Lectionary (Exodus 32:7–11, 13–14; Psalm 51:3–4, 12–13, 17, 19; 1 Timothy 1:12–17; Luke 15:1–32) are particularly poignant for the anniversary. These readings and the prayers of the Mass especially resonate with the Year of Mercy, providing the homilist with rather obvious themes of mercy and forgiveness. Pope Francis, in fact, refers to the day’s Gospel in *Misericordiae Vultus* (*The Face of Mercy*), Bull of Indiction of the Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy:

In the parables devoted to mercy, Jesus reveals the nature of God as that of a Father who never gives up until he has forgiven the wrong and overcome rejection with compassion and mercy. We know these parables well, three in particular: the lost sheep, the lost coin, and the father with two sons (cf. Lk 15:1–32). In these parables, God is always presented as full of joy, especially when he pardons. In them we find the core of the Gospel and of our faith, because mercy is presented as a force that overcomes everything, filling the heart with love and bringing consolation through pardon.
While human instinct may impel the homilist to focus primarily on the tragedy of the lives lost in the attacks, Pope Francis and the Scripture readings remind us of the need to pray for and also forgive those who committed the abhorrent acts of terror, just as Christ forgave those who killed him. Into that theme, the preacher can weave the Collect’s attention to mercy. In that prayer, we pray “that we may feel the working of your mercy, grant that we may serve you with all our heart.” Our petition is for our service to God, which brings the benefit of God’s mercy. We can consider how our acts of mercy serve God.

The singing of the Penitential Act will highlight the anniversary, especially when the words reflect the heart of the people. Parishes may find Option I in Appendix VI of the Sample Invocations for the Penitential Act especially appropriate. In that option, the priest petitions the Lord who “came to gather the nations into the peace of God’s kingdom.” (Marty Haugen’s setting of the Mass of Remembrance [GIA Publications] uses these words.) The dialogue setting of the Penitential Act in the Order of Mass echoes the words of the older brother in the day’s Gospel reading, and could be used as well. For the Eucharistic Prayer, either of the Eucharistic Prayers for Reconciliation would be appropriate.

SELECTING MUSIC

The selection of music will help set the tone and should reflect the readings and Missal texts as well as the mood of the day. The following hymns might be considered: “Christ in the Rubble,” text and tune by Genevieve Glen, OSB; SEPTEMBER HOPE (Oregon Catholic Press [OCP]); “Hymn of the Jubilee of Mercy,” text by Eugenio Costa, sj, music by Paul Inwood (http://www.im.va/content/gdm/en/giubileo/inno.html); “In Every Age,” text and tune by Carl P. Daw, JR., an Episcopal priest and lyricist, wrote “When Sudden Terror Tears Apart” (Hope Publishing Co.), a hauntingly beautiful and appropriate hymn text. This hymn can be sung to the tune ST. ANNE or any other common meter tune and should be sung in its entirety since it concludes with a hopeful pronouncement of the Paschal Mystery of Christ.

While many are tempted to sing “Let There Be Peace on Earth” when peace is a focus, the song is not the best choice for the liturgy. This song incorrectly suggests that peace begins with the individual. While we are summoned to carry peace to the world, it doesn’t begin with “me,” but rather with Christ and his inauguration of the Reign of God.

While choosing any piece of music while preparing the liturgy for this anniversary, remember that the focus is on the Paschal Mystery. We participate in the Paschal Mystery as we unite with Christ and those who died, including those who committed the heinous acts of terror. Caution needs to be exercised regarding patriotic songs. Since the tragedy of September 11, 2001, patriotic songs have been sung more frequently in some parishes. Many parishes sing “America the Beautiful,” complete with its words of adoration directed toward our nation, rather than God, the rightful recipient of the praise of the Church at worship. At some parishes, “God Bless America” is a favorite, despite its lack of theological depth and its association with secular culture. As we prepare the liturgy, we must be sure not to allow our patriotism to usurp our worship of God.

LITURGY OF THE HOURS

While the celebration of Mass, the source and summit of the Church’s prayer life, will likely be the primary gathering in commemoration of September 11, the communal celebration of the Liturgy of the Hours should be considered as well. Celebrating the "hinge" hours, Morning and Evening Prayer, can lead participants deeper into the Paschal Mystery as they allow the recesses of their hearts to be touched. The psalms, which Jesus prayed throughout his Passion, Death, and Resurrection, clearly express the sorrow, loss, pain, and despair many feel on this day. (Most Catholic hymnals offer a template for Morning and Evening Prayer.)

Celebrating Morning Prayer could be a challenge in parishes with Mass scheduled at multiple times in the morning. Though the General Instruction of the Liturgy of the Hours (GILH) provides a format for combining Morning Prayer with
Combining choirs with the other houses of worship may cement relationships and encourage participation among the members of all the communities. Such gatherings might incorporate Scripture passages, music, intercessory prayer, and preaching, perhaps by more than one person. The Order of Christian Funerals could be used as a reference in planning. Prayers for the Dead (#398), especially for one who died suddenly or one who died violently, or even Prayer for the Mourners could be used during an ecumenical prayer service. If prayed in an interfaith context, these prayers could be appropriately reworded. Including a reading from the Pentateuch, the biblical texts common to the Christian, Jewish, and Muslim faiths, would be appropriate. Genesis 50 offers a beautiful reflection on the movement from mourning to forgiveness. You might also consider a reading of poetry or a piece by a writer such as like Kahlil Gibran.

While the Prayer of St. Francis comes from the Christian tradition, it is appropriate for an interfaith gathering. In the preparation of an interfaith prayer service, be mindful of focusing on what is shared in common with other faiths rather than on what is unique to a particular faith.

For ecumenical gatherings, you may want to turn to the “Masses and Prayers for Various Needs and Occasions” in the Missal and consider the Antiphons and Collects in 16. For Reconciliation; 21. For the Nation or State; 30. For the Preservation of Peace and Justice; and 42. For Our Oppressors. Images of healing, reconciliation, and justice permeate these prayers. Prayers from the Masses for the Dead also could be used or adapted. The Collects from II. On the Anniversary; III. Various Commemorations, and B. For Several Deceased Persons or for All the Dead could be used at the beginning of the prayer service as well as at the end of the intercessory prayers or at the conclusion of the prayer service.

Taizé Prayer especially lends itself to gatherings that include members of a spectrum of denominations. This prayer in a candlelit space around the San Damiano cross, and perhaps other icons, does not reflect the worship of any one denomination and so reaches out to all. Participants lift up their hearts in prayer and are consoled through repetitious chants, readings from Scripture, prolonged period of silence, and intercessory prayer. While a general structure is suggested for this type of prayer service, it is very adaptable. Resources can be found on the Taizé website, http://www.taize.fr/en, and the music publisher GIA, http://www.giamusic.com/sacred_music.

**OTHER CONSIDERATIONS**

Parishes interested in expanding their artistic works for this anniversary, may want to look into the icon of Our Mother of Sorrows by Lewis Williams that Bridge Building Images offers (http://www.bridgebuilding.com/narr/lwmos.html). The icon, available in various sizes and formats, depicts the Blessed Mother embracing the smoke-engulfed World Trade Center.
and the living out of the Christian life. St. Augustine reminds us that when we receive the Eucharist, we become what we receive, the Body of Christ. As that transformed Body, we become Christ for the life of the world, and, as liturgical theologian Fr. Aidan Kavanagh, osb, put it, “liturgy is doing the world the way the world was meant to be done.” The tragic events of September 11, 2001, remind us of the need to transform the world.

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As the fifteenth anniversary of September 11, 2001, approaches, not every option suggested here will or should be implemented in a parish. Pastoral leaders will want to look at their resources and situations to come up with a plan to mark this auspicious day with respect and reverence to those whose lives were taken that day and for the loved ones who continue to mourn them. Ultimately, any remembrance of this day, as with any celebration of the liturgy, points to Christ’s Paschal Mystery, his victory over sin and death. It also leads the faithful to greater participation in that mystery through the celebration of the Mass