



Marking the Fifteenth Anniversary of September 11

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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.

In the homily, preachers can weave the focus of mercy found in the Collect with that of the father in the parable of the prodigal son.

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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 music by Janèt Sullivan Whitaker (OCP); "O Day of Peace that Dimly Shines," text and tune by Carl Daw, JERUSALEM (OCP); "O God, Our Help in Ages Past," text by Isaac Watts, tune ST. ANNE (GIA, OCP, World Library Publications [WLP]); "Our Father, We Have Wandered," text by Kevin Nichols, tune PASSION CHORALE (WLP and GIA); "Sing with All the Saints in Glory," text by William J. Irons, tune HYMN TO JOY (GIA, OCP, WLP); "The Master Came to Bring Good News," text by Ralph Finn, tune ICH GLAUB AN GOTT (GIA); "This Is My Song," text by Lloyd Stone and Georgia Harkness, tune FINLANDIA (GIA, OCP, WLP); *Ubi Caritas*, various composers and publishers; "Yes, I Shall Arise," text and music by Lucien Deiss (WLP).

Within days after the terrorist attacks in 2001, 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.



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Intercessions should reflect the changes that have occurred during the passage of fifteen years.

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



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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.

For interfaith and ecumenical services, communities may want to combine their choirs.

Mass, doing so often blurs the lines between the two and may confuse parishioners when the practice is not done regularly. Those who choose the option of Morning Prayer will find that the reading (2 Timothy 2:8, 11–13) offers consoling words to those who mourn the dead with the loving reminder that those who have died with him shall also live with him. The words of the Canticle of Zechariah will reassure and provide a reminder of God’s infinite love and mercy as we pray: In the tender compassion of our God / the dawn from on high shall break upon us, / to shine on those who dwell in darkness and the shadow of death, / and to guide our feet into the way of peace.

For many parishes Evening Prayer will be a better option. Beginning this liturgy with a service of light will provide a reminder of Christ’s victory over sin and death. As the reading (Hebrews 12:22–24) is proclaimed, the congregation should draw comfort from the words: “You have drawn near to Mount Zion and the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem.” Through the mercy and compassion of God, those whose lives were taken fifteen years ago may have experienced the heavenly Jerusalem. As the *Magnificat* is prayed, the congregation is reminded of God’s enduring covenant in the words: He has come to the help of his servant Israel for he has remembered his promise of mercy, the promise he made to our fathers, to Abraham and his children for ever. The parish may choose a psalm other than what is appointed for the day (cf. GILH, 252); however, the words of Psalm 112 may evoke the selfless acts of the first responders and others who gave their lives that day: Open-handed, he gives to the poor; / his justice stands firm for ever. / His head will be raised in glory.

ECUMENICAL, INTERFAITH GATHERINGS

Parishes may see the observance of September 11 as a time to come together with other denominations and/or faiths with an ecumenical or interfaith gathering. Such gatherings acknowledge the sorrow that is shared across denominations and faiths and that prayer has the power to unite all who observe this day.

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 repetitive 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.

This could be displayed on an easel near the Paschal candle on September 11, or in some other place where people could see it, without its distracting from the altar or other primary liturgical furnishings. Prayer cards could also be distributed.

Local circumstances ought to be considered when preparing prayer service for this observance. For example, a service at a parish in New York or Washington, DC, where several parishioners may have died as a result of the attacks, might look different or have a different focus than a service on a college campus. A careful balance between the needs of grieving family members fifteen years later and the larger picture of a grieving country and world needs to be taken into account during the preparations.

If a parish-wide gathering is not possible on September 11, it would be appropriate to hold a service on the Feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross (September 14) or the Memorial of Our Lady of Sorrows (September 15), both days that offer consolation and hope. These complementary feasts remind us of Christ's ultimate victory over death and the mantle of protection that Our Lady offers, even in the pain of her son's Passion and Death.

As an important component of the Church's liturgical prayer, intercessory prayer should be given pride of place both at Mass and at the Liturgy of the Hours or ecumenical services on September 11. At this fifteenth anniversary, the intercessions should reflect the circumstances that have changed with the passage of time. In the intervening years, babies whose parent(s) died in the attacks have grown into teenagers, widows and widowers have remarried, and a number of persons suffer physically from the breathing of toxic fumes or emotionally from post-traumatic stress disorder. As a nation, the political landscape continues to be impacted from that day, and the reaction to people of the Muslim faith remains a serious roadblock to peace. Each of these varied circumstances needs to be articulated in the intercessions.

No matter the form of our observance, in the forefront of our preparation should be the call that Pope Francis made for an encounter with members of other faiths. In *Misericordiae Vultus*, he asks us to seek an understanding and to open our minds and hearts to them.

I trust that this Jubilee year celebrating the mercy of God will foster an encounter with these religions and with other noble religious traditions; may it open us to even more fervent dialogue so that we might know and understand one another better; may it eliminate every form of closed-mindedness and disrespect, and drive out every form of violence and discrimination.

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

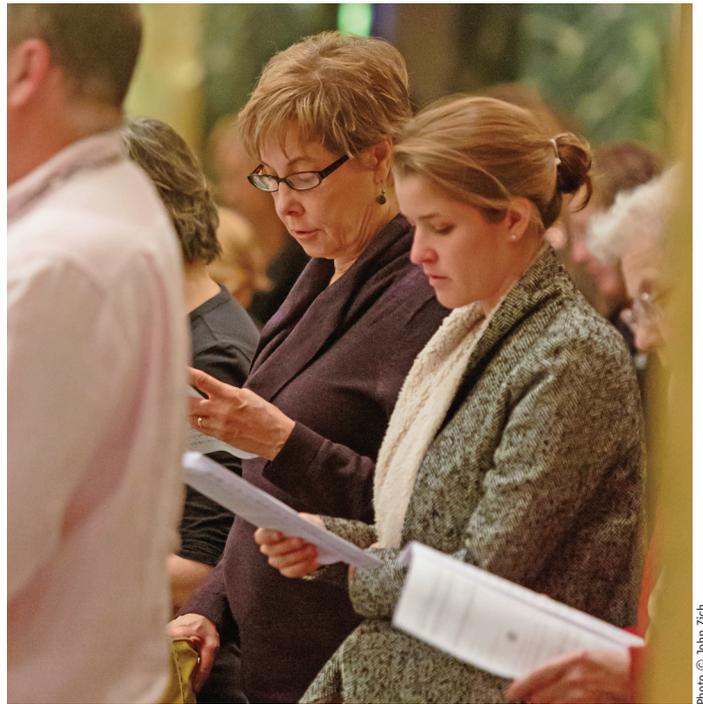


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The music on the anniversary of September 11, 2001, should focus on the Paschal Mystery, not patriotism.

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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At www.PastoralLiturgy.org

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