

“WHEN THERE ARE NO WORDS”

SUNDAY ORDINARY 24 B

FOR SEPTEMBER 12, 2021 – ST. PATRICK CATHOLIC CHURCH

*“. . . whoever wants to save their life will lose it,
but whoever loses their life for my sake,
and for the sake of the gospel will save it.”*

I was watching the Today show,
part of my normal morning routine
on a sunny Tuesday morning,
September 11, 2001.

The hosts at the time were
Katie Couric and Matt Lauer.
Matt, after looking at one of his monitors,
casually said:

“It looks like a small plane has impacted one
of the World Trade Center Towers.”

Well, it seemed odd to me that something like this
hadn't happened before, given the amount of
small plane traffic there must be in that area
of New York City.

But, within a matter of a few hours
A grim reality was to unfold:

Four planes hijacked-
With passengers and crews-
Crashed and burning-
Three World Trade Center Buildings-
Collapsed and burning-
A section of the Pentagon-
Collapsed and burning.

Nearly 3,000 people killed;
Passengers,
Flight attendants,
Workers,
Bystanders,
First responders.

I share the feeling of Fr. James Martin, an
American Jesuit, who says that day still
feels “*unbearably fresh.*”¹

It’s hard to believe
that some of you sitting here in front of me
today, were not yet born on that day.

How do I begin to tell you
what it was like to live that day?

The acrid, foul-smelling cloud
and soft gray ash that covered everything
within a mile of the Towers.

¹ AMERICAMAGAZINE.ORG September, 2021 article by James Martin

The great national unity that emerged,
and the disappointment that followed;
the realization that the biggest change
would be more war.

It was a time of death –
a modern place of Calvary for so many families.

It was hard for me to recall St. Paul's words:

“We do not want you to be unaware, brothers and sisters, about those who have fallen asleep, so that you may not grieve like the rest, who have no hope.” (1 Thess. 4:13)

In the weeks following, however, there were definite signs of resurrection-
volunteers, who came from across the country;
rescue workers searching for survivors;
and first responders who had given their lives
in service to others as they raced into the
burning buildings.

“No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends.” (John 15:13)

Fr. Martin also says, and I quote:

“Words are ultimately inadequate to fully communicate profound experiences.”²

In addition to the many words on network

² Ibid

and cable television that day,
there were thousands of images taken of the
destruction as well as the rescue efforts.
Many of those images are still too painful for my eyes.
But there is one particular image
that still makes those
signs of resurrection real for me.

It's been called an *American Pietá*³ –
an image that expresses our country's
collective and profound grief.
Five first responders with ash-covered faces,
walking over the rubble,
lovingly removing the lifeless body
of the first recorded victim of 9/11.

That victim was a Franciscan Friar
named Mychal Fallon Judge,
a Chaplain for the New York
Fire Department - a Catholic priest.

Fr. Judge, like many other first responders,
had rushed to the site,
praying over people lying in the streets
and eventually entering the North Tower.

He was heard praying aloud,
*"Jesus, please end this right now!
God, please end this!"*⁴

³ Prigge, Matt (May 3, 2006). "[Upward Christian Soldier](#)". *Philadelphia Weekly*.

⁴ Daly, Michael (2008). *The Book of Mychal: The Surprising Life and Heroic Death of Father Mychal Judge*. St. Martin's Press. [ISBN 978-0-312-30150-7](#)

He was killed by falling debris
when the South Tower collapsed.

Fr. Judge continues to be one of my personal heroes.

***“No one has greater love than this, to lay down
one’s life for one’s friends.” (John 15:13)***

I have a copy of that photo with me
if you would like to see it,
but I chose not to display it since
it may be too explicit for some.

Instead, I show you this image that
hangs in my home,
one that bears a striking resemblance,
not from the Calvary of 9/11,
but from a Calvary two thousand years ago.

Jesus’ friends were also lovingly removing
the lifeless body of our Lord
after he had given his life for us.

***“... whoever wants to save their life will lose it,
but whoever loses their life for my sake,
and for the sake of the gospel will save it.”***

Yes, Fr. Martin, *“Words **are** ultimately inadequate
to fully communicate profound experiences.”*

. . . and sometimes, there are no words . . .