

Twelve years ago, on the Sunday after the attacks on New York City and Washington DC on September 11, 2001, I prepared a homily reflecting on the readings for the Sunday after that awful Tuesday - September 16th. I was praying over those readings this morning, September 12, 2013, since they will be read this coming Sunday, September 15, and I looked up that homily. I found that it expressed my feelings and faith today concerning that event and those Scriptures.

Exodus 32:7-11, 13-14 "*They have made for themselves a golden calf and are sacrificing to it.*"

Psalms 51 "*I will rise and go to my father.*"

1 Timothy 1:12-17 "*I was a persecutor but I was treated with mercy.*"

Luke 15:1-32 "*There will be great joy in heaven over one sinner who repents.*" [the parables of the lost sheep, the lost coin and the Prodigal Son]

♪♪ "Turn to me, O turn and be saved, says the Lord, for I am God,
There is no other, none beside me, I call your name." ♪♪

As I was hit by the events of this past week, [September 11th, 2001] that song became part of my prayer. I heard questions in my heart: Who can we turn to? Who will save us? Who have we turned to already?

I'm still reeling from Tuesday's tragedy. I was in Arizona on vacation, getting ready to board a shuttle to the airport in Phoenix when I heard about the collapse of the World Trade Center towers and the plane that crashed into the Pentagon. I was in shock, and I still am to a degree. I felt like I was watching a bad horror movie over and over again.

Then I felt deep sadness as I heard the news that Fr. Mike Judge, a chaplain for the NYC fire department and a Friar I know personally, had been killed by the collapse of the first tower as he was helping firefighters look for survivors. I wept in the airport in St. Louis where our plane was delayed as I watched part of his funeral. And I feel deeply sad for so many who have lost family and friends, especially those who are still not accounted for.

But when the reality of what had happened began to sink in, I had other feelings: I felt *angry*, angry at those who had done it *and* at those who had not seen it coming. I felt *afraid*, for myself and for many others, not only those directly threatened by terrorists, but also those condemned because they looked middle eastern or practiced Islam. And most of all I felt *vulnerable* and *powerless*.

I turned to God and asked God to help me make sense of all of this, to help me get through it and to make choices that might help others. And then I read the Scriptures for today [the 24th Sunday in Ordinary Time, C cycle] and heard God's voice:

As I read the reading from Exodus, I saw how people in our own day are still making molten calves and worshiping them. I saw how easy it is today to turn to false gods that promise instant answers without much commitment or effort.

The killers turned to terror and sacrificed themselves to a god named "fear". Thousands are dead because they could find no other way to be heard and so sacrificed themselves to fear.

Some Americans turned to anger, talking of revenge and retribution. Our own political leaders are threatening to kill tens of thousands of people because thousands have been killed on American soil.

If we follow through we become like the terrorists we are condemning. Anger is natural at a time like this, it is a reaction we all must pass through. If it becomes a god to guide our choices it is just another molten calf which cannot save us or heal us. Pope John Paul has warned us not to contribute to the spiral of anger and violence which can only increase the incidence of terror.

Some in our world turn to wealth, a golden calf which is the favorite false god of too many corporations and their executives. I like to call it "money-theism". The illusion is that if we spend enough we can make ourselves secure. Yet a powerful symbol of our wealth lies in rubble, making the powerlessness of the god whose name is money clear to the whole world.

The terrorists are dead, their accomplices are being hunted down. The World Trade Center has collapsed. Financial markets are in chaos. The Pentagon has been severely damaged. Who *can* we turn to for healing, for salvation? To make sense out of what has happened, to guide our choices as individuals, as families, as parishes, as a nation and as a family of nations?

"Turn to me", says the God of the Gospel parables. I am the shepherd seeking a lost sheep, the woman searching for a lost coin, the father welcoming a lost child. The parent who considers both sons to be his children, the younger one who took the money and ran, and the elder son who would not let go of his anger. I am the God who says: **YOU ARE ONE HUMAN FAMILY, START ACTING LIKE IT!** Remember who I am when you say **OUR** Father because I am creator and lover of both Jew and Palestinian, of American Catholics and Australian Aborigines.

Turn to me, I am the Christ who died for you. Listen to me cry out in pain in the person of the poor who are kept in terror by any nation or ideology.

Listen to me crying out in those held in economic slavery by multi-national corporations who worship profit, and in those women and children who are being bought and sold by human trafficking.

Listen to me crying out from the earth itself, damaged and ignored by corporate greed and leaders of nations who are controlled by it.

Listen to the pain of the oppressed and ignored whose anger has hardened into hatred and whose fear has turned to a despair that sees no other choice than turning to terror to get the attention of the rich and powerful.

Turn to me, I am the Holy Spirit who calls you to repentance, giving you the honesty to look at your own participation in oppression, even in small ways, to look at how we have helped to sow the seeds of terrorism. Turn and pray today's Psalm: "Have mercy on me, O God, in your goodness ... a steadfast spirit renew within me."

Turn to me, the Spirit that transformed Paul from a terrorist into an apostle, from an arrogant oppressor into a loving disciple of truth.

Turn to me and receive the Spirit that empowered Fr. Mychal to give his life in NYC, the Spirit of solidarity who is inspiring so many to give blood so others can recover. The Spirit of listening that can lead to reconciliation and can begin to pull out the roots of terrorism by the healing power of the only true God who still sings:

♪♪ "Turn to me, O turn and be saved, says the Lord, for I am God,
There is no other, none beside me, I call your name." ♪♪