

**"I shall arise and return to my Father"**  
**(Luke 15)**

**In memoriam**

*September 11<sup>th</sup>-16<sup>th</sup>, 2001*

The Father is surely moved with compassion today in seeing you all here; He surely embraces each one with the same tenderness as He did the Prodigal Son. Your presence today carries within it deep needs for reassurance and hope; I am glad that you turn to God and His Church for these.

Also our Holy Father the Pope has been moved with compassion for you all. I would like to read you the words he spoke last Wednesday in Rome; it is important that you know he cares deeply for you and that he is with you.

*"I cannot begin this audience without expressing my profound sorrow at the terrorist attacks which yesterday brought death and destruction to America, causing thousands of victims and injuring countless people. To the President of the United States and to all American citizens I express my heartfelt sorrow. In the face of such unspeakable horror we cannot but be deeply disturbed. I add my voice to all the voices raised in these hours to express indignant condemnation, and I strongly reiterate that the ways of violence will never lead to genuine solutions to humanity's problems.*

*Yesterday was a dark day in the history of humanity, a terrible affront to human dignity. After receiving the news, I followed with intense concern the developing situation, with heartfelt prayers to the Lord. How is it possible to commit acts of such savage cruelty? The human heart has depths from which schemes of unheard-of ferocity sometimes emerge, capable of destroying in a moment the normal daily life of a people. But faith comes to our aid at these times when words seem to fail. Christ's word is the only one that can give a response to the questions which trouble our spirit. Even if the forces of darkness appear to prevail, those who believe in God know that evil and death do not have the final say. Christian hope is based on this truth; at this time our prayerful trust draws strength from it.*

*With deeply felt sympathy I address myself to the beloved people of the United States in this moment of distress and consternation, when the courage of so many men and women of good will is being sorely tested. In a special way I reach out to the families of the dead and the injured, and assure them of my spiritual closeness. I entrust to the mercy of the Most High the helpless victims of this tragedy, for whom I offered Mass this morning, invoking upon them eternal rest. May God give courage to the survivors; may he sustain the rescue-workers and the many volunteers who are presently making an enormous effort to cope with such an immense emergency. I ask you, dear brothers and sisters, to join me in prayer for them.*

*Let us beg the Lord that the spiral of hatred and violence will not prevail. May the Blessed Virgin, Mother of Mercy, fill the hearts of all with wise thoughts and peaceful intentions."*

**(Pope John Paul II, Wednesday audience September 12<sup>th</sup>, 2001)**

I have just read, with a very Scottish accent, the English translation of an Italian speech of a Polish Pope. This week I have felt baptized as an American. But here and now I speak to you as a shepherd to his flock. Read my heart, not my lips.

The mixture of strong feelings aroused in us by Tuesday's terror is both natural and necessary. Many, and foremost the President, have used eloquent words to articulate those feelings. But you and I, with those we love, we need to express those feelings for ourselves so that we can take control of them and make them serve reason and love, and not depression, self-pity and self-righteousness. I encourage you to do that in the intimacy of your homes and relationships: use words, music, picture, poetry, tears and tenderness. Grief and anger, if managed well, can bring much life and hope.

Our Lady is Mother of all Consolation and Comforter of the Afflicted. Her Immaculate Heart and merciful eyes ponder the pain of our sore, heavy and broken hearts. Behold, She is our Mother, above all when the Cross of Jesus shines more forcefully in our lives. Go to Her and let Her come to you. She will give you the comfort and the rest of Jesus' own Heart.

The arms of God the Father are open for America and the world. It was in his misery that the prodigal son remembered those arms. The remembrance of the Father nurtured his hope to live, to move out and on, not to another God-forsaken place, but back home, to God. Brothers and sisters, be vulnerable to God's embrace. It is Jesus who gives us the strength, as He gave it to Moses and St. Paul, to turn to the merciful power of the Father in our helplessness and impotence, in our unconsolable anguish and dreadful vulnerability. We implore from Him the courage and confidence of the prodigal son.

Man's inhumanity to man is no news, but is always shocking. The wanton destruction of life is man's connivance in Satan's futile war to destroy God. The Cross is where this war reached its definitive battle and where the man who is God defeated Satan forever. Our suicide assassins, alas, seem not to have known the true God, and in their satanic scheming they sacrificed themselves and thousands of others to the idol of their own anger. But the souls of the just are in the hands of Jesus, the Mighty Hero, the Valiant Warrior; and He will raise them up on the last day.

There is no human wisdom that can explain Tuesday's terror, as there was none to explain the Cross of Jesus. There is no miracle that will take the pain away, just as there was none to spare the agony of Jesus. The Cross takes us beyond wisdom and miracles and calls us to place all the evil we do and the evil done to us into the cry of abandonment and trust of Jesus from that Cross. The Cross shapes our path of return to the Father. In embracing the open arms of Jesus Crucified we are in fact embraced by the Father who raised Him from the dead. In Adam, we are the prodigal son who left the Father; in Jesus, we are the sons and daughters who return to Him.

Are we then to lie down and die? On the contrary. We are to arise and return to Our Father with the undaunted hope of the exile returning home. Jesus carries our death that we might carry His life. So, the believer's response is to be alive, to make alive and to give life. Our hearts are troubled, but we lift them up to the Lord. We act and pray against desolation. Console my people, says the Lord.

And so, in His name I call upon you who believe in Him: arise, be lifted up, be consoled, be comforted and across the storm walk steadfastly towards Jesus. Focus on Jesus! Refocus on Jesus! Let terror be gone and let there be a revolution of hope in your hearts. Get rid of any crummy, so-called values that have perhaps hitherto stolen your hearts from true faith in God. Reform your lives. Work for a society built on implementing, and not just talking, about values worthy of the truth of Jesus. Root out not just those guilty of terror but all those habits of mind, heart and body which lead you to do evil to yourselves and to others, and so lead to death.

In the coming days: confess your sins to the priest and leave behind once and for all whatever holds you in the pig-sty of evil. Receive frequently the bread of life. Think of things you can say or do that will give hope, encouragement, confidence, care and tenderness to those around you. Lead your children into the life of God by family prayer and the example of virtue. Take courageous decisions for good and truth, make symbolic gestures: plant a tree, light a candle, have a baby, get more ice-cream! Beg God for the difficult graces of hope, compassion and forgiveness towards all others. Give joy to God and His angels by your own sincere repentance.

I have to finish with these words of Jesus:

**"Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul; fear him, rather, who can destroy both body and soul in hell. Can you not buy two sparrows for a penny? And yet not one falls to the ground without your Father knowing. Why every hair on your head has been counted. So there is no need to be afraid: you are worth more than hundreds of sparrows."**

So: fly, my fellow sparrows, fly!

*Peter Magee*

Msgr. Peter Magee  
September 16<sup>th</sup>, 2001