

God, Life, and Everything Remembering September 11

Today is September 11. It still, has an ominous ring to it, even after twelve years. There are high school kids who have no memory of a pre-9/11 world. For them, life has always contained al Qaida and war in Afghanistan and Iraq.

That makes me incredibly sad. I remember watching TV as the second plane hit, my 2-year-old-son watching beside us before we had the presence of mind to remove him from the room. So many sad things have happened since then. So many thousand US troops killed. So many tens of thousands of Afghani and Iraqi lives -especially civilian lives - lost.

Today, as we look back on that horrible day, young folks will approach the ceremonies with a certain sense of obligation - sort of like we did when we had commemorations of Pearl Harbor. But come to think of it, we did not have public commemorations of that fateful day. Not once. Even if we did, though, i suppose i would have gone through the motions, felt as though i was supposed to feel patriotic, and then hoped it would be over soon so i could go hang out with my friends. That's youth.

September 11 became the Pearl Harbor of my generation. My part was very small, serving for a brief time as Red Cross chaplain for those affected by the attacks, volunteering in a kitchen to prepare meals for the recovery workers. And praying. Praying that people's souls of all religions might seek a better way than violence. We kept the church open 24 hours a day for that first year (until our insurance company told us we had to stop). Praying that the despair or anger or hubris or lack of creativity that makes people lash out might be healed.

I find myself still praying that prayer today. Praying that we might find a more creative response, for example, to the horrid use in Syria of poison gas. Praying that we might work with other nations for some diplomatic solution (though I am not naive enough to think that everyone will kiss and make up, or even that one party is more righteous than the other). Praying that the recent deal brokered by Russian really can bring the immediate crisis to a close, with Syria handing any stores of chemical weapons to international inspectors for destruction.

I don't know if it will work. But it seems the best option at the moment, and if nothing else, twelve years of fighting have shown us that the military option has severe limits, both practical and moral. It can't - isn't meant to - change hearts and minds. It is by its nature destructive in a world where we need healing. For that, we'll need patience, wisdom, and lots of prayer.

I've been praying pretty non-stop since September 11, 2001. It doesn't look like I'll be able to stop any time soon. In truth, the world has always been a violent place, so I'll never stop praying.

Please keep in your prayers those who were so horribly affected by those attacks twelve years ago, those killed in battle since then, and the innocent victims of all violence everywhere. May we be healers in a broken world, and not bringers of further pain.