

TWENTY-FOURTH SUNDAY - B

Today/Yesterday we commemorate[d] the 20th anniversary of the terror attacks of September the 11th.

As we recall the events of that day and the days that followed we cannot help but remember the selfless heroism we witnessed.

At the World Trade Center and the Pentagon we saw firefighters, EMT's, police, and even ordinary citizens running into danger trying to save others.

I will never forget the picture of four firemen carrying the body of Fr. Mychal Judge, their chaplain, who rushed in to comfort the dying and was killed when the south tower collapsed. He was designated as victim number one.

And, of course there were the heroic passengers and crew of Flight 93 who made the decision to sacrifice their own lives in the hope of preventing the death of others.

"Whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and that of the gospel will save it."

We cannot know how many of 9/11's heroes saw themselves as explicitly imitating the self-sacrifice of Jesus, but I believe that every act of selfless love participates in his Cross and Resurrection.

Those of us who profess our faith that Jesus is the Christ also believe that he is the Suffering Servant speaking in the first reading from Isaiah.

There can be no Christ without the Cross.

That's the mistake made by Peter in today's gospel.

He was "thinking not as God does, but as human beings do."

God was willing to make the greatest sacrifice of all, the gift of his Son, whose passion and death gives eternal meaning to all the suffering that ever was and ever will be.

This is the Good News: That all of our hardships, our tragedies, our struggles, our daily disappointments ... anything we experience as a loss can be transformed into a source of salvation when united with the Cross of Jesus.

If you think about it, all of life, everywhere throughout the universe, participates in the cycle of death and resurrection we call the Paschal Mystery.

Any real kind of growth requires a kind of death, a letting go of what was for the sake of what will be.

When Jesus tells us that we must deny ourselves, take up our cross, and follow him he is not inviting us be miserable all of the time ...

... he is challenging us to embrace a life of loving without limit which has the capacity to change the world!

St. James reminds us that we have to put our faith into action by doing good works.

You and I are given the opportunity ... the privilege ... to build the Kingdom of God one act of kindness and generosity at a time.

Otherwise, as St. Paul warns, claiming to have faith without putting it into practice is worthless, it's a dead end.

One of the best concrete ways to live out our faith in the Paschal Mystery is to practice patience and compassion.

I know that I have said it before, but we all need to be reminded that the words "patience" and "compassion" are both rooted in the Latin word "passio" which means "suffering."

When we choose to be patient and to show compassion we are willing to "carry the cross" of that particular person or situation.

We are denying ourselves the chance to lash out in judgement of the other.

In this context, to "lose our life" often means letting go of the need to be the one who is right, the one who has the last word.

As disciples of Jesus let us ask ourselves: "Where am I being called to live out the Paschal Mystery through patience and compassion?"

"How can I better put my faith into action in the way I treat every person I encounter?"

God forbid that any of us will ever have to run into a burning building or experience again the terror of 9/11 ...

But each day we are challenged to "lose our lives" for the sake of Jesus and his Gospel.