

When The Community Laments

Prayers during times of terrorism

Terence P. Curley

Paris, France suffered its worst experience of violence and terror since the Second World War. Our social media with its worldwide connectedness broadcast images of immense sorrow which will always be in our lives. Caring and empathic responses have been issued by countries throughout the world.

This attack makes us as Americans recall and relive the events of the 2001 attack we suffered in New York. Now our hearts and prayers are with the French people in their time of sadness and grief. The Vatican response given by Fr. Lombardi captures our innermost feelings of shock and numbness upon hearing the tragic news of terror.

“At the Vatican we are following the terrible news from Paris. We are shocked by this new manifestation of maddening terrorist violence and hatred which we condemn in the most radical way, together with the pope and all those who love peace. We pray for the victims and the wounded, and for all the French people. This is an attack on the peace of all mankind which requires a decisive and supportive response by all of us to counter the spread of homicidal hatred in all its forms. “

Community Expressions

The social media in the aftermath of the tragic events shows us many remembrances now adorning the tragic places of violence with flowers, scripts of

Prayerful wishes for the deceased and other adornments made clearly visible for the world to see. Loved ones and friends gather in sorrow along with a world which experiences their pain through such tragic loss of life. They gather in deep sorrow for those victimized by what terrorists have done blaspheming in the name of God as they maim and kill the innocent.

The scriptures provide us with ways to express our hope that God's intervention will change our feelings of emptiness, fear and sadness while we become even more aware of the events and how they occurred. We need to place our losses and the losses of the French people into the context and framework of faith.

There is a need to come together for prayer. There is a need for people in trauma to overcome fear. There has to be a willingness to resume as best as possible a normal way of life,

Safety and stability is given when communities respond in prayerful ways. This is already evident by the many memorials and prayer services. Notre Dame Cathedral is a visible sign of the sacred in Paris which has down through the ages stood as witness to faith amid terrible events.

Sense of Vulnerability

Survivors of traumatic events may have a heightened sense of being vulnerable. This applies to people who witness the attack both personally and via the media. It further may extend to people who experience traumatization from learning of relatives, friends, and acquaintances that were subject to violence.

Children & Trauma

Repeated media accounts have to be taken into consideration with small children. They mistakenly may think that as events are repeated on the screen that they are still occurring. We noted this at the time of the Twin Towers. The continuous coverage being constantly repeated did mislead some children. The same thing was evident with Hurricane Sandy and how children witnessed the repeated coverage. They even thought with the wind in the trees that the hurricane was there. It is more than important to show children that they are safe.

God Is Our Shelter And Strength

Shortly after our experience of the Twin Tower terrorism The American Bible Society published a small booklet with words of comfort and hope from the Bible. The introduction posed the following questions. "How could this happen?" "Are my friends and family safe?" "How could anyone commit such an evil act?" "Is the situation hopeless?"

The booklet relates how acts of political terrorism often strike without warning. It describes the shock, fear and a sense of outrage and how this overwhelms us. We may have feelings of helplessness and abandonment. What the booklet does is place our loss amidst devastation into the context that God does care and is "always ready to help in times of trouble." Psalm 46.1

Rebuilding Trust & Hope

When traumatic loss happens we immediately realize that our world is not and may never be the same. In many ways we revise the world we assumed would remain constant. We need to draw strength from our resources in faith. We know from the depth of our being that we are lamenting. The faith of the Psalmist's too felt this in praising God by way of lamenting. The Psalms unlock our deepest emotions give our faith true expression in crying out to God.



In the scriptures there is considerable literature about lamenting. It is especially evident in the person of Jeremiah. The Rembrandt painting on the destruction of Jerusalem is a startling portrayal of the Prophets grief. It pictures him against the backdrop of the destruction of the Temple. At his feet are certain salvaged artifacts. So too for ourselves as we salvage, revise, and rebuild our lives amidst destruction. Jeremiah and the painting is a meditation for mourning.

Throughout the Hebrew Scriptures there is a crying out to God. We can readily look to the Books of Job, Lamentations, and the Psalms of Lament. There is a conversing with God as remarkable expressions of our whole being responding in healthy and healing ways to traumatic suffering.

The laments are helpful for the purpose of indentifying with a crisis. While they are not actual descriptions of the situation they focus our feelings of helplessness such a crisis engenders for all who are in any way involved. We are

given permission to cry and manage our conflicts by expressing them with a loving and compassionate God.

Pastoral Ministry

Pastoral ministry relates ritual to life's reality. Our rituals have to express ourselves in relationship to God and each other. The gathering together is a time of accepting the empowering prayer of the entire community. The believing community is in communion with other communities in the Body of Christ. This is so apparent with the empathic response we have for our French brothers and sisters. We are in prayer connected with those who are suffering. After all we recall the words of St. Paul: "If one member suffers in the body of Christ which is the Church, all the members suffer with that member." (1Corinthians 12:26) These words of Paul help us to maintain a good perspective. At the same time they cultivate our revising and rebuilding our lives.

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Community Laments & Prayers

Our prayers are with the French People. Through the intercession of the saints from France we hope there is the experience of healing given to those who suffering so many traumatic losses. May the families of those victimized by the terror inflicted upon them live with hope and rebuild their lives with the hope for the heavenly reunion with those who have died. May they rest in Peace.

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Community Laments and Prayers for France

We gather together to pray for the peace which is beyond understanding to descend upon us and the People of France. We pray for the souls who suffered at the hand of evil acts. May they now enjoy the peace of the Kingdom of Heaven. We ask you our loving God to intervene and assist us in combating evil especially in the form of terrorism. We ask you and all of the Saints to hear our pleas for healing and hope. R. Amen

Litany to Special Saints from France:

Through the intercessions of these saints we make our prayer for these who died and are grieving in Paris and throughout France:

Saint Therese of Lisieux, Patron of France, Pray for them

Saint Joan of Arc, Patron of France, Pray for them

Saint Martin of Tours, Patron of France, Pray for them

Saint Remigius, Patron of France, Pray for them

Saint John Vianney...

St. Louis.....

Saint Jean Jugan...

St. Margaret Mary Alacoque

Saint Genevieve

St. Madeline Sophie Barat

Saint Denis

St. Catherine Labore

Saint Bernard of Clairvaux

St. Vincent de Paul

Saint Germain Cousin

St. Vincent de Paul

Saint Peter Julian Eymartd

St. Jean-Baptiste de La Salle

The Hail Mary (The Prayer to our Lady (Notre Dame) now and at the hour of our death...

Je vous salue, Marie pleine de grace; Le Seigneur est avec vous.

Vous etes benie entre toutes les femmes et Jesus, Le fruit de vos entrailles, est beni

Sainte Marie, Mere de Dieu, priez pour nous pauvres pecheurs, maintenant et a l'heure de notre mort. Amen

