

24th A September 11, 2011

How quickly the time has passed since that bright Tuesday morning ten years ago when we were stunned by the news of an attack on our country. Now two wars and many more deaths since, we gather as Catholics and as Americans to remember.

Two flags grace our sanctuary this weekend. To your right is the Papal Flag, symbolic of the Kingdom of God. We are Christian believers, disciples of Jesus, citizens of the Kingdom and of heaven. As Catholics, our first response to any situation is: what does God want us to do? What does it mean to follow Jesus in this situation? We are under God, not over God!

The other flag needs no introduction. Men and women have died so that the Stars and Stripes may wave, men like Andrew Haglage, who grew up in Holy Trinity Batavia and was shot down in Viet Nam in 1969. Soldiers like Chuck Kiser, who grew up here at St. Bernadette and was killed in Iraq in 2004. On this September 11, the American flag flutters over a country that is struggling—politically, militarily, financially, spiritually. Flags and fireworks will not help as much as participation and prayer—writing our congressman, crying out to God.

587 years before Jesus was born, Israel, God's chosen people, were invaded, and the city of Jerusalem was destroyed—by the Babylonians, who dwelled in what is now Iraq. The Babylonians attacked, not with 747's, but with swords, spears, and clubs. The invaders from the east terrorized Jerusalem, killed many of its men,

drove many others into exile; they left behind the elderly and the very poor. And for many, many years, the Israelite people asked God, "How could Jerusalem, our greatest city, be destroyed?" And they asked themselves, "What does God want of us Jewish people?" And a man named Ben Sira wrote down these thoughts, which you heard in the first reading from the Book of Sirach. He wrote: "Wrath and anger are hateful things, yet the sinner hugs them tight!" And again Ben Sira wrote, "Could anyone nourish anger against another and expect healing from the Lord?" And once again he wrote, "If anyone who is but flesh cherishes wrath, who will forgive his sins?"

The Bible preserves those words after Jerusalem had been attacked, after the nation of Israel had been invaded and occupied. How ironic that we hear them on this September 11.

So, we cannot hug anger; we cannot cherish wrath. But perhaps as Catholics and Americans we can cherish something else today. We can cherish the passengers and crew of Flight 93, who retook control of their jet only 20 minutes before it would have struck either the White House or the Capitol. We can hug Army Lieutenant Tammie Duckworth. In November 2004, she was piloting a Black Hawk helicopter over Fallujah when an RPG exploded in the front glass bubble--in her lap--vaporizing her right leg, amputating the left, blowing off most of her right arm. And we can hug Sergeant Juanita Wilson, who walked into Tammie Duckworth's hospital room just a few weeks after she herself had lost her arm. Sergeant Juanita Wilson *took off her right arm, looked down at Tammie Duckworth*

and said, "You're going to be fine. You're going to make it. Let me stand next to you."

And perhaps that is what God would say to our country on this September 11: "You're going to be fine. You're going to make it. But let Me stand next to you."

And so we observe this September 11 by standing next to one another, by refusing to hug wrath or to nourish anger against any religion, any country, or any person, by becoming active citizens of the Kingdom of God and our nation.