



The Holy See

JOHN PAUL II

GENERAL AUDIENCE

Wednesday 12 September 2001

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.

Today, my heartfelt sympathy is with the American people, subjected yesterday to inhuman terrorist attacks which have taken the lives of thousands of innocent human beings and caused unspeakable sorrow in the hearts of all men and women of good will. Yesterday was indeed a dark day in our history, an appalling offence against peace, a terrible assault against human dignity.

I invite you all to join me in commending the victims of this shocking tragedy to Almighty God's eternal love. Let us implore his comfort upon the injured, the families involved, all who are doing their utmost to rescue survivors and help those affected.

I ask God to grant the American people the strength and courage they need at this time of sorrow and trial.

I greet with special affection the Carmelite Family, gathered here with a large group of pilgrims from many nations on the occasion of the meeting that commemorates the 750th anniversary of the giving of the Scapular. Dearly beloved, this happy event involves not only those devoted to Our Lady of Mt Carmel, but the whole Church because the rich Marian heritage of Carmel has become in time, thanks to the spread of devotion connected with the Scapular, a treasure for the entire People of God. Draw constantly from this wonderful spiritual patrimony in order to be credible witnesses to Christ and to His Gospel in daily life.

With the Letter that I wrote last 25th March to the Superiors General of the Order of the Carmelites and of the Order of the Discalced Carmelites, I invited you to this special dedication. In it, among other items, I wrote that the Scapular is essentially a habit which evokes the protection of the Blessed Virgin Mary in this life and in the passage to the fullness of eternal glory. The Scapular also reminds us that the devotion to her must become a "uniform", that is a Christian life-style, woven of prayer and interior life. I hope that this anniversary may be for each one of you an occasion for personal conversion, for community renewal, in which we will respond to the divine grace which fortifies us on the path to holiness.

At the end of the General Audience address, the Holy Father offered the following prayer of the faithful in Italian.

The Holy Father:

Brothers and Sisters, in great dismay, before the horror of destructive violence, but strong in the faith that has always guided our fathers, we turn to the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, salvation of his people, and with the confidence of children, pray that He will come to our aid in these days of mourning and innocent suffering.

Cantor:

Dominum deprecemur: Te rogamus, audi nos.

1. For the Churches of the East and the West, and in particular for the Church in the United States of America so that, though humbled by loss and mourning, yet inspired by the Mother of the Lord, strong woman beside the cross of her Son, they may foster the will for reconciliation, peace, and the building of the civilization of love.
2. For all those who bear the name of Christian, so that, in the midst of many persons who are tempted to hatred and doubt, they will be witnesses to the presence of God in history and the victory of Christ over death.
3. For the leaders of nations, so that they will not allow themselves to be guided by hatred and the spirit of retaliation, but may do everything possible to prevent new hatred and death, by bringing forth works of peace.
4. For those who are weeping in sorrow over the loss of relatives and friends, that in this hour of suffering they will not be overcome by sadness, despair and vengeance, but continue to have faith in the victory of good over evil, of life over death.
5. For those suffering and wounded by the terrorist acts, that they may return to stability and health and, appreciating the gift of life, may generously foster the will to contribute to the well being of every human being.
6. For our brothers and sisters who met death in the folly of violence, that they find sure joy and life everlasting in the peace of the Lord, that their death may not be in vain but become a leaven bringing forth a season of brotherhood and collaboration among peoples.

The Holy Father:

O Lord Jesus, remember our deceased and suffering brothers before your Father.
Remember us also, as we begin to pray with your words: Pater noster...

O Almighty and merciful God,
you cannot be understood by one who sows discord, you cannot be accepted by one who loves violence: look upon our painful human condition tried by cruel acts of terror and death, comfort your children and open our hearts to hope, so that our time may again know days of serenity and peace.

Through Christ our Lord.

Amen.