Friday of the 23rd Week of Ordinary Time

25th Anniversary of September 11, 2001

Homily of Bishop John O. Barres

St. Agnes Cathedral

September 11, 2026

Faith, hope, and love bring us together today to celebrate this Mass on the 25th anniversary of September 11, 2001.

They assist us in praying for the 2,977 souls who perished on September 11, 2001 in New York, Washington, D.C., and Shanksville, Pennsylvania, and to pray for those who have died from 9/11-related illnesses in the last two decades.

Faith, hope, and love have gathered us here to pray with and through the Lord Jesus, so that, as He offers Himself to the Father at this Mass, we may offer with Him – faithfully, hopefully, and lovingly - prayers for our beloved dead and a firm petition that grace, wisdom, consolation and peace be granted to us, our country, and the world.

We anticipate too our September 14th celebration of the Feast of the Exaltation or Triumph of the Holy Cross and the September 15th Memorial of Our Lady of Sorrows.

We are, in the words of St. Paul, "ambassadors of Christ" and ambassadors of the Triumph of the Holy Cross and the Triumph of Christ's Divine Mercy in history.

We witness to the world that the Word of God cannot be chained!

Faith, hope, and love. As we remember the 25th anniversary of that tragic day, these virtues, which animate and gather us, can serve, too, as a lens. They can focus our thoughts and prayers.

They can help us see God in the midst of confusion and heartache. They can remind us of our path forward, which entails, now as always, walking as faithful, hopeful, and loving missionary disciples of Jesus Christ.

The stories of 9/11 are living and compelling commentaries on the Parable of the Good Samaritan.

We have to shout these September 11, 2001 Good Samaritan stories from the rooftops of the world to the generations who have no living memory of that day.

These Good Samaritans of 9/11 and beyond teach us with Saint Paul that the Word of God cannot be chained by sin, terrorism, war, violence and disrespect for the sanctity and dignity of human life.

Think of Father Mychal Judge who represents every first responder who died that day and who we pray for at this Mass.

Faith animated and transformed Father Mychal Judge's life. His vocation as a Franciscan priest was born from it, and faith strengthened him as an FDNY chaplain to be present to the chaos, confusion, and darkness that overwhelmed that bright, sunny, September day.

Father Judge knew the gift of faith, and he bore witness to it. Firefighters and others would have seen this virtue alive in the man and in the priest first-responder as he prayed in the lobby of the North Tower.

They would have seen, too, hope. His presence alone testified to it: Someone living differently because of the victory of Christ. Finally, they would have witnessed love, and in his passing, they saw a love of which there is none greater, namely, laying down one's life for one's friends.[1]

Father Judge's story - so well known - is but one in which the Parable of the Good Samaritan shone radiantly that day. He stands for the multitude taken from us, each of whom showed faith, hope, and love in their lives.

Fr. Kevin Smith, the pastor of Our Lady of the Snow Blue Point, was present that day. He was the friend and brother priest who found and identified the body of Fr. Judge in a hallway.

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[1] John 15:13

Then with dedicated Firefighters, they brought Fr. Judge's bleeding body and laid it in front of the Altar of Sacrifice in St. Peter's Church on Barclay Street, the oldest Catholic Church in New York.

In his priesthood, Fr. Judge had celebrated and lived the rhythm of the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. It was so fitting and so marvelously theological that he was reverently laid at the foot of the Altar of Sacrifice.[2]

May that compelling theological image of the priesthood inspire many young men to embrace a life of sacrifice and Good Samaritan heroism and courage in embracing a call to the Catholic priesthood.

This image is a reminder to us that as we commemorate this 25th Anniversary of 9/11, as we pray for the souls we remember and love, as we celebrate this Mass together, that the Catholic Mass, the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ, is the true way of all our loves, all of our griefs and all of our Crosses on earth.[3]

The greatest tribute we can make to those who died on 9/11 is to be radically faithful to the Mass, radically faithful to the Eucharist for we Catholics believe, in the illuminating doctrine of the Communion of Saints, that friendship goes beyond the chasm of death.

That radical fidelity compels us to be missionaries of the Eucharist and the Mass by casting the nets of Eucharistic Charity and invitation everywhere we go.

Our memories of 9/11 are memories of the Parable of the Good Samaritan lived heroically and courageously.

We think today of Welles Crowther, "the man in the red bandana."

Wall Street Journal writer Peggy Noonan featured the story of Welles in her 15th anniversary of 9/11 piece in 2016.[4]

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[2] Cf. Bishop Michael Saltarelli's "The Spiritual Lessons of September 11: A Pastoral Statement on the One-Year Anniversary," *The Dialog*, September 5, 2002, 6-7.
[3] Cf. A quote from J.R.R. Tolkien in James T. O'Connor, *The Hidden Manna: A Theology of the Eucharist*, (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1988), 336-337.
[4] See Peggy Noonan "Remembering a Hero, 15 Years after 9/11," *Wall Street Journal*, September 9, 2016.

Welles grew up in Nyack, NY going with his banker—volunteer firefighter Dad to a fire station where he would help clean the trucks and where he breathed from a young age the fire fighter culture.

Welles loved his Dad. One day they were wearing nice suits and Welles noticed that his Dad had a handkerchief in his suit pocket.

Welles wanted one too so his Dad put a makeshift handkerchief in Welles' suit pocket and he put another one in his back pocket.

As his Dad explained to Welles, the handkerchief in the suit was "for show"; the handkerchief in his back pocket was "for blow!"

Later, Welles went to Boston College where he played Division I lacrosse.

As we Long Islanders know, lacrosse players have cat-like reflexes and reactions and a spatial awareness of the lacrosse field.

Welles' Division I lacrosse training and instincts were providential in the heroic way he responded that day.

He was working that morning as an investment banker in the south tower of the World Trade Center on the 104th floor.

Wearing his red bandana sometimes around his head and sometimes around his mouth to help him navigate the smoke, Welles somehow found the only functioning stairway and kept leading people down from the top floors to the lower floors where they could make their way out. Then he'd go up and find some more.

The fire department credits him with as many as 18 saved lives. They found his body six months later in the lobby of the south tower. He had made it all the way down. He was found in an area with many firefighters' remains.

In the months that followed, those he rescued recognized him by the pictures his parents shared of him in his red bandana.

Every fall, the Boston College Eagles dedicate a 5K run and one of their home football games to Welles Crowther and the Eagles all wear red bandanas in tribute to Welles.

The Boston College Eagles soar like the Eagle of St. John the Evangelist as they tell and retell to every new BC Class the Good Samaritan story of Welles Crowther, Boston College Class of 1999.

In *Fratelli Tutti*, Pope Francis says that "The story of the Good Samaritan is constantly being repeated" (71) and that "each day we have to decide whether to be Good Samaritans or indifferent bystanders."

People like Welles Crowther and Fr. Judge enshrine and emblazon in our memories that critical gospel lesson.

The virtues were lived by those who perished, and faith, hope, and love were displayed in the days, weeks, months, and years that followed 9/11.

How powerful it is to remember the faith that carried us as families, communities, and as a country. How instinctively so many turned to the Lord and lived the gift of faith!

How powerful it is to share the Gospel Good Samaritan parables of 9/11 with future generations.

They illustrate so powerfully that the inspired Word of God cannot be chained!

Our Lady of Sorrows personifies faith, hope, and love. Our Lady was present at the foot of the Cross. She is present with us now. May she intercede for us.

And may all the souls of the faithful departed rest in peace.

Let perpetual light shine upon them, upon their families, upon all their loved ones, and upon the world. Amen.