

A Beautiful Day, A Horrible Event

On crucifixion, Resurrection, and 9/11

John Garvey

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On September 11, I heard that a plane had hit one of the World Trade Center towers, and thought it was a terrible accident; within minutes another plane sliced through the other tower, and we all knew that it was not.

The light and air on the day of the attack were beautiful. I was reminded of a chilling passage in Endō's *Silence*. During the persecution of Christians in Japan a priest is told that unless he renounces his faith, those he has been serving will be drowned, one by one; and as they are dying, Endō makes a point of the fact that the day was beautiful. The birds sing, a breeze is blowing, the trees are lovely.

When I looked west down the Long Island Expressway I could see the horizon full of smoke. My wife called to say that she probably couldn't make it home from Manhattan that evening; the subways she needed weren't running. She spent the night in Harlem with friends. It wasn't an easy night to be alone, but I was glad she was safe. When I woke late at night I heard an airplane, and knew it was a military plane. I realized that this was an unusual thought for an American to have.

A couple of days later the streets in our neighbourhood were filled with the smell of burning and a haze that stung the eyes, blown in from lower Manhattan. I thought of the attention to breath that is important in meditation practice, and wondered as I breathed not only what I was breathing in, but who. When I mentioned this to my sister she said, "There's something sacramental about that," and it is a dark truth.

The small Orthodox church I serve as pastor is usually full on Sundays. The Sunday following the horror it was packed. We were lucky, in a way; no one in our congregation was lost. But we do have members who know people who were. Almost any words said in the face of this sort of evil sound pale and trivial. All I could think to say was that while we can't help being obsessed by this mystery of evil, by the hardness of the hearts behind it, there are also mysteries of goodness. There was the heroism of the firefighters and rescue workers; there were the people who lined up to donate blood in such numbers that the system could not accommodate them; there was the fact that so many of those final phone calls, from the towers and from the planes, were not calls for vengeance, but final declarations of love; and while there are nervousness and anxiety on the streets, there is also a tenderness I have never seen. Gandhi said somewhere that what we usually regard as history is a history of failures, a history of human beings behaving in disastrous ways; but the truer history of the human race is the daily fact of cooperation, help, and even love. That was apparent in many ways after the attack.

The Sunday following the disaster was, on the Orthodox calendar, the Afterfeast of the Elevation of the Cross. It occurred to me that on this side of the grave the cross is the most obvious fact: human beings suffer and die. It is not a small thing that while all the Gospels describe the crucifixion of Jesus, not one describes the Resurrection. This must be understood by faith. We are shown the empty tomb; we do not see him rising in glory. When he appears to the disciples at Emmaus the risen Lord appears as a stranger. There is nothing obvious about the Resurrection, nothing easily seen or grasped; the cross is all too obvious, and we can be stopped by it, we can think that this is all there is to life. Faith in the Resurrection does not cancel out what happens on

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the cross; the cross is its beginning. Archbishop Anastasios of Albania has said that the Resurrection begins *in* the cross, and this is where our faith must be, especially in a time when we are confronted with evil and hatred on such a massive level.

It is not, however, a faith that on this side of death everything will be all right. We know more than ever how small and vulnerable we are. And while the vulnerability can make us more tender, it can also make us want to strike out. While some response is clearly called for, if it involves innocent civilians it will harden not only the hearts of our enemies, but our own. As I drove to church toward the end of the week I saw a few planes in the sky and had two emotions at once: things are returning to some sort of normality; and I felt a deep foreboding, one I feel every time I see an airplane now. One woman in our congregation told me that she found it hard to pray after this horror. I thought of St. Paul's words about the truest prayer: the Holy Spirit prays in us, with groans too deep for utterance. That's how we are praying now.

Getting back to Normal—More or Less

We have been slowly picking up in our parish activities after the difficult Covid times we have been through. Caution is still important, notably the wearing of masks in church, sanitising etc. All these things have become part of best practice and several of them seem likely to continue into the future.

However, our numbers have picked up quite quickly and a rough estimate tells us that we are back to about 65-70% of our pre-Covid congregation.

Our 10am mass is back to pre-Covid numbers and in the coming month we would like to restore the important 12.40 daily mass for workers in the area who very much appreciate this opportunity.

We have had confirmation this Saturday and Holy Communion will follow in the next few weeks. All of this is a cause for joy and celebration in our parish as it is throughout the diocese. Again caution is necessary and we will be guided by best practice at all these happy events.

WE are happy to welcome back the French-speaking community after their summer break. Their masses will take place on the 2nd and 4th Sundays of the month.

THOUGHT FOR A DAY

In late May of this year, I went to visit Mexican Baptist churches in Tijuana that had transformed their sanctuaries to receive thousands of migrants – families and children, mostly – who had come to the border seeking asylum and were waiting to have their cases heard. As I met with pastors who were receiving the migrants, I asked, “Why are you doing this? What motivates you to open your churches and give refuge to these people while they wait for their claims to be heard, even though this could take months?” Every single pastor gave me the same answer. First, “Why would you ask that? Isn't it obvious?” Then they would tell me about the love of God. They would tell me that God wanted them to do this.

They had no choice, they said. When people are in need, you help them.

NARCOTICS ANONYMOUS MEETING

Wednesday 8pm, Thursday 4pm, Friday 8pm
St Mary's Parish Centre
Haddington Road, Dublin 4

IN MEMORIAM

12 September, 11am

Bernie Guerin

18-19 September

6pm Vigil

Tina, Michael & Patsy Gaffney

26 September, 11am

Legion of Mary Centenary Mass

Masses and Confession

All Sunday mass times will now be fully restored. However, we are still limited to 100 people divided into two pods within the church and all the health protocols will be strictly adhered to.

Sundays: Vigil, 6pm (Saturday), 9.30am, 11am, 5pm

Croatian Community Mass 6.30pm

French-speaking community mass 2nd and 4th Sundays of the month at 12.30

Daily masses 10am only for the moment

-**Rosary** daily after 10am mass

Adoration Blessed Sacrament, Weds 10.30-12.40