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National Day of Prayer and Remembrance Address



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President and Mrs. Bush, I want to say a personal word on behalf of many people. Thank you, Mr. President, for calling this day of prayer and remembrance. We needed it at this time.

We come together today to affirm our conviction that God cares for us, whatever our ethnic, religious, or political background may be. The Bible says that He's the God of all comfort, who comforts us in our troubles. No matter how hard we try, words simply cannot express the horror, the shock, and the revulsion we all feel over what took place in this nation on Tuesday morning. September eleven will go down in our history as a day to remember.

Today we say to those who masterminded this cruel plot, and to those who carried it out, that the spirit of this nation will not be defeated by their twisted and diabolical schemes. Someday, those responsible will be brought to justice, as President Bush and our Congress have so forcefully stated. But today we especially come together in this service to confess our need of God.

We've always needed God from the very beginning of this nation, but today we need Him especially. We're facing a new kind of enemy. We're involved in a new kind of warfare. And we need the help of the Spirit of God. The Bible words are our hope: God is our refuge and strength; an ever present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, though the earth give way, and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea.



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But how do we understand something like this? Why does God allow evil like this to take place? Perhaps that is what you are asking now. You may even be angry at God. I want to assure you that God understands these feelings that you may have. We've seen so much on our television, on our -- heard on our radio, stories that bring tears to our eyes and make us all feel a sense of anger. But God can be trusted, even when life seems at its darkest.

But what are some of the lessons we can learn? First, we are reminded of the mystery and reality of evil. I've been asked hundreds of times in my life why God allows tragedy and suffering. I have to confess that I really do not know the answer totally, even to my own satisfaction. I have to accept by faith that God is sovereign, and He's a God of love and mercy and compassion in the midst of suffering. The Bible says that God is not the author of evil. It speaks of evil as a mystery. In 1st Thessalonians 2:7 it talks about the mystery of iniquity. The Old Testament prophet Jeremiah said "The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure." Who can understand it?" He asked that question, 'Who can understand it?' And that's one reason we each need God in our lives.

The lesson of this event is not only about the mystery of iniquity and evil, but secondly it's a lesson about our need for each other. What an example New York and Washington have been to the world these past few days. None of us will ever forget the pictures of our courageous firefighters and police, many of whom have lost friends and colleagues; or the hundreds of people attending or standing patiently in line to donate blood. A tragedy like this could have torn our country apart. But instead it has united us, and we've become a family. So those perpetrators who took this on to tear us apart, it has worked the other way -- it's back lashed. It's backfired. We are more united than ever before. I think this was exemplified in a very moving way when the members of our Congress stood shoulder to shoulder the other day and sang "God Bless America."

Finally, difficult as it may be for us to see right now, this event can give a message of hope -- hope for the present, and hope for the future. Yes, there is hope. There's hope for the present, because I believe the stage has already been set for a new spirit in our nation. One of the things we desperately need is a spiritual renewal in this country. We need a spiritual revival in America. And God has told us in His word, time after time, that we are to repent of our sins and return to Him, and He will bless us in a new way. But there's also hope for the future because of God's promises. As a Christian, I hope not for just this life, but for heaven and the life to come. And many of those people who died this past week are in heaven right now. And they wouldn't want to come back. It's so glorious and so wonderful. And that's the hope for all of us who put our faith in God. I pray that you will have this hope in your heart.

This event reminds us of the brevity and the uncertainty of life. We never know when we too will be called into eternity. I doubt if even one those people who got on those planes, or walked into the World Trade Center or the Pentagon last Tuesday morning thought it would be the last day of their lives. It didn't occur to them. And that's why each of us needs to face our own spiritual need and commit ourselves to God and His will now.



Here in this majestic National Cathedral we see all around us symbols of the cross. For the Christian -- I'm speaking for the Christian now -- the cross tells us that God understands our sin and our suffering. For He took upon himself, in the person of Jesus Christ, our sins and our suffering. And from the cross, God declares "I love you. I know the heart aches, and the sorrows, and the pains that you feel, but I love you." The story does not end with the cross, for Easter points us beyond the tragedy of the cross to the empty tomb. It tells us that there is hope for eternal life, for Christ has conquered evil, and death, and hell. Yes, there's hope.

I've become an old man now. And I've preached all over the world. And the older I get, the more I cling to that hope that I started with many years ago, and proclaimed it in many languages to many parts of the world. Several years ago at the National Prayer Breakfast here in Washington, Ambassador Andrew Young, who had just gone through the tragic death of his wife, closed his talk with a quote from the old hymn, "How Firm A Foundation." We all watched in horror as planes crashed into the steel and glass of the World Trade Center. Those majestic towers, built on solid foundations, were examples of the prosperity and creativity of America. When damaged, those buildings eventually plummeted to the ground, imploding in upon themselves. Yet underneath the debris is a foundation that was not destroyed. Therein lies the truth of that old hymn that Andrew Young quoted: "How *firm* a foundation."

Yes, our nation has been attacked. Buildings destroyed. Lives lost. But now we have a choice: Whether to implode and disintegrate emotionally and spiritually as a people, and a nation, or, whether we choose to become stronger through all of the struggle to rebuild on a solid foundation. And I believe that we're in the process of starting to rebuild on that foundation. That foundation is our trust in God. That's what this service is all about. And in that faith we have the strength to endure something as difficult and horrendous as what we've experienced this week.

This has been a terrible week with many tears. But also it's been a week of great faith. Churches all across the country have called prayer meetings. And today is a day that they're celebrating not only in this country, but in many parts of the world. And the words of that familiar hymn that Andrew Young quoted, it says, "Fear not, I am with thee. Oh be not dismayed for I am thy God and will give thee aid. I'll strengthen thee, help thee, and cause thee to stand upon" my righteous -- on "thy righteous, omnipotent hand."

My prayer today is that we will feel the loving arms of God wrapped around us and will know in our hearts that He will never forsake us as we trust in Him. We also know that God is going to give wisdom, and courage, and strength to the President, and those around him. And this is going to be a day that we will remember as a day of victory. May God bless you all.