

Homily for September 11, 2001, Requiem
August 31, 2020

By the Reverend Stephen Gerth

Revelation 7: 9–17; Psalm 130; John 10:11–16

My friends Jill and Michael Basden were in touch with me this morning. Michael is the retired rector of Trinity-by-the Cove Church in Naples, Florida. In 2001, after dropping off their son for school in Massachusetts, they arrived at the rectory on Sunday, September 9. I met Jill and Michael when our paths crossed for a year at Nashotah House Seminary. We were both rectors in the diocese of Northern Indiana when I was called to Saint Mary's and, a few months later, he was called to Trinity-by-the-Cove.

They love New York and were taking a few days with me in the city to celebrate their wedding anniversary. Michael would be our preacher on Friday, for Holy Cross Day. We always get in touch on this anniversary. Words do not begin to encompass the tragedy that took the lives of so many people that beautiful morning.

I was at Morning Prayer when the first plane hit the north tower. After the service, Father Matt Weiler, then-Father, now Bishop Allen Shin, and I had coffee

outside, across at the then-Au Bon Pain café in the Fox News Building's breezeway. We were unaware of what had happened until we had finished our coffee.

Michael's then-brother-in-law was not in his office at the Pentagon when the terrorists' plane killed so many there, but we would not know that until later in the day.

When we got back to the church, we put our cassocks on. Matt Weiler headed out to Times Square. The Lenten purple frontal went on the altar. Masses for the departed were celebrated daily at 12:10 PM and after Evening Prayer, at 6:20 PM. Prayers for our nation were offered. No members of this parish were killed in the attacks, but many went to more than one funeral for a friend or former colleague. It would be years before I could look down Sixth Avenue without recalling the burning towers or the smell that lingered as the fires burned for 100 days. I can still remember getting off a train downtown at Fulton Street in November and being hit by that smell. When the final number of deaths was determined, we were thankful that the attacks were so early in the day—most people were not yet at work downtown. A group of us from Saint Mary's was at Ground Zero to help with the

firefighters' feeding and other first responders on the last day that there was hope that some had survived.

On Sunday, September 16, 2001, the gospel was from Luke, Jesus' words about the lost sheep and the lost coin.¹ Though not without emotion, I was able to begin the sermon with these words: "No sheep were lost at Ground Zero."

I mentioned Jill Basden at the beginning of this sermon. When her mother died in September 2017, I found myself writing to her something new for me. I know I will always feel separated from my mother, who died in 2013. Not a day goes by without me thinking of my mother and my father, who died in 2015. What I wrote was that I don't think they feel any separation from us. They are, to quote Saint Paul, "alive to God in Christ Jesus."² No sheep were lost at Ground Zero.

✠ In the Name of the Father, and of the Son,
and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

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¹ Luke 15:1–10.

² Romans 6:11.