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We fear that every day is 9/11

Phyllis Zagano | Sep. 14, 2011 Just Catholic

What we may remember most about the 10th anniversary of September 11 in New York is that nothing happened. Nobody blew up the George Washington Bridge. Nobody flew a botulism-spraying crop-duster over Midtown Manhattan. Nobody set off mustard gas in the middle of St. Patrick's Cathedral.

It was an otherwise ordinary Sunday in the City. Except half the town was scared to death.

The ceremonies were almost a distraction. For brief moments remembrance overtook fear, as we bravely mustered belief that nothing else will happen. Firefighters, police, and military stood in full dress uniform as the names rang out again from the gaping wound in the country's heart.

Well beyond the confines of the ceremony at the World Trade Center site, for miles across Manhattan to New Jersey and the outer boroughs, to Long Island and up the Hudson River, other firefighters, police, and military stood and stand, on high alert. Assault rifles and barricades were at the ready. Nothing happened. Yet.

We do not know what we fear, except we fear everything. The odd suitcase in the bus terminal, the swarthly passenger on the airplane, the crack of a backfiring car are all adrenaline producing.

They say the devil's only weapon is fear. Of what are we afraid?

A Gallup poll six years or so ago asked young teenagers what they feared most. Terrorists topped the list. Except for spiders and heights and being ignored, most everything else hinted at or spoke directly of a type of violence.

There is a lot of that in all of us.

So then, how do we allay our fears?

Most people turn to God. Except at what we now call Ground Zero, clergy of every description lent consoling words. Mayor Bloomberg decreed there would be no clergy praying at his ceremony, perhaps permanently ending New Yorkers' detente with the concept of clergy-led civil religion.

Elsewhere things were different. At the unpretentious C.W. Post Campus of Long Island University, the Catholic chaplain ran a simple ceremony: the Jewish, the Protestant, the Muslim chaplains prayed, and a Catholic deacon spoke. Also on Long Island, hundreds gathered on the shore at a town park to hear the local Catholic high school chorus, and the rabbi, and the pastor, and the priest.

But, what may have been Bloomberg's attempt at a wholly secular ceremony had ample mentions of the Lord, and God, and even Jesus Christ. The family members who named the dead were undeterred by New York City's apparent ban on ceremonial religious talk. The politicians joined in, too.

President Obama read from Psalm 46 in a stilted easily translatable cadence. Former Mayor Giuliani read from

Ecclesiastes, invoked God, and asked that all be reunited in Heaven. Former President George W. Bush read from Abraham Lincoln's famous letter to the mother of a soldier killed in battle: ?I pray that our Heavenly Father may assuage the anguish of your bereavement, and leave you only the cherished memory of the loved and lost, and the solemn pride that must be yours to have laid so costly a sacrifice upon the altar of freedom.?

So, it seems God did get in the program after all.

Even so, I'm not that happy about the mayor's outright ban on clerics there that Sunday morning. It seems something the American Civil Liberties Union and Madalyn Murray O'Hair would want to do. But, you know, despite the ban that kept Christian and Jewish and Muslim clerics away that day -- and we do not know all the considerations, perhaps involving recommendations from Homeland Security and those other agencies that try to keep us safe -- I think it worked.

I think it demonstrated a ?civil religion? that this country owns, where every citizen is free to call on God or Allah or Yahweh or Whomever in public without any fear of reprisal or rebuttal. And I think if there was fear the bad guys might use video of this priest or that rabbi to load another plane with madmen, then calling upon the Creator by officials and by families lent no (or at least less) grist to their twisted propaganda mill.

In fact, it may have served to tamp down all our fears a little bit.

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