

VIEW FROM THE HEIGHTS

September 2021

Greetings,

When tragedies of national or international importance strike, everyone remembers where they were when the news broke. My Mum used to talk about the lovely weather they were having when Britain went to war with Germany (September 3rd, 1939). The incongruity was its own memorial. Pearl Harbor and the assassination of President Kennedy similarly seared both memory and imagination.

Where were you when those planes flew into the Twin Towers? What were your thoughts? And prayers?

It was my first day at Weston Jesuit School of Theology. The school was abuzz with students rushing to complete registration and course enrollments for the coming term. Suddenly, Bob Manning (Fr. Robert, SJ), WJST president, appeared in the lobby with a small television. There, faculty, staff and students clustered in shocked silence.

Despite the horrific events unfolding, each person knew themselves to be cared for, supported and held in prayer. It was the best of places to experience the worst of events.

Like war and assassination, terror attacks can cause deep wounds far beyond the immediate casualties. Our sense of safety is shaken; our trust - in our nation, our neighbours, and our faith - is challenged.

Sometimes, these existential shocks help us to grow. On other occasions, the impact is deformational. We turn upon each other. (*Is he a German/Japanese spy? A Moslem terrorist? Even if he's Sikh?*) And we turn upon God. The Holy One is parodied by the aggressors to defend their actions. Whilst those overwhelmed by fear and uncertainty find false assurances in the belief that the events are part of some unfathomable Divine plan. Either way, our Heavenly Parent is accused of being the prime mover. Meanwhile, no one remembers to comfort God.

Anxiety and despair may deform the spirit. But they are also opportunities for our hearts to enlarge. The selfless courage of those who responded - during and after - the 9/11 attacks was beyond awe inspiring. As was the subsequent worldwide outpouring of support for the US.

After the invasion of Afghanistan, Americans and others were moved to help its ordinary citizens, especially women and girls. A Royal Marine founded an animal welfare centre.¹ To paraphrase Dickens, "It was the worst of humankind, it was the best of humankind."

In his book, "The Screwtape Letters," C.S. Lewis vividly described the human gift for great kindness amidst massive cruelty. Writing during the Second World War, he made his eponymous demon complain that:

Humans "are creatures of that miserable sort who loudly proclaim that torture is too good for their enemies and then give tea and cigarettes to the first wounded German pilot who turns up at the back door."

Unlike Screwtape, Lewis meant that as a compliment! And now it's time for America and the free world to live up to his - and God's - expectations.

To offer tea and comfort to the thousands of refugees fleeing from Afghanistan.

To ensure that food and medical supplies remain available to those who stay behind.
To support the evacuation of shelter animals.ⁱⁱ
To open our countries, our communities and our hearts to God's beloved.

*I was hungry and you fed me,
I was thirsty and you gave me a drink,
I was homeless and you gave me a room,
I was shivering and you gave me clothes,
I was sick and you stopped to visit,
I was in prison and you came to me.*

*I'm telling the solemn truth: Whenever you did one of these things to someone overlooked or ignored, that was me—you did it to me.
Matthew 25: 35-40 The Message*

May you experience the peace of God this September 11th.
May you trust in God's generous love.
May you be blessed and be a blessing.

Brenda

ⁱ Nowzad, "Winning the War for Animals", comprises a shelter, a veterinary clinic, support for working animals, & animal welfare educational resources.

ⁱⁱ "Operation Ark" at Nowzad.com