



ST. BARTHOLOMEW the APOSTLE
ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH

24th Sunday 2021 - 9/11

Thank you, Chief Lestarchick and your entire department, as well as, all our first responders - our police officers and rescue squad. In a very real and concrete way you live out Jesus' mission - *"No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one friends."* Thanks also to Commissioner Al Mirabella, who worked alongside the other Union County commissioners, coordinating the response to assist the first responders in NYC.

I suppose there are very few people who don't remember exactly where they were and what they were doing twenty years ago today when incredulous newscasters began reporting the bizarre and deadly events of what we now simply call, "9-11." Some of us lost friends, or family, or acquaintances that day. Memories like that don't just fade away over time. They remain startlingly real and emotional as long as you live.



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Mindful of that, two things I'd like us to consider as we remember 9/11 – **FAITH** and **WORKS**.

In a parable of life, a man is rowing his boat on a lake. Inscribed on one oar is the word "**FAITH**." On the other oar is the word "**WORKS**." The oars are symbolic of our duty as followers of Christ. If that man pulls on only one oar at a time, he will get nowhere. The boat will go around in circles.

In today's Gospel Lesson, Jesus asks the disciples, "*Who do you say that I am?*" The Apostle Peter answers, "*You are the Christ*" (Mk. 8:29). Peter was identifying Christ as the Messiah of God, his Lord, and Savior. **That's Faith!**

Then Jesus went on to teach the disciples that He "*must suffer many things*." He described His mission on earth as sacrificial. And He made it clear that the same would be true in the mission of the disciples. "*If any man would come after Me, let him deny*



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himself," Jesus said. Let him "take up his cross and follow Me"

(Mk. 8:29). **That's Works!**

UNLESS YOU ARE LIVING YOUR FAITH, YOU ARE GOING AROUND IN CIRCLES. FAITH AND WORKS MUST PULL TOGETHER IN THIS SENSE. THEY ARE INSEPARABLE.

Let me give you an example. Fr. Mychal Judge, was the much loved NYC Fire Department Chaplain who was one of the first to die on 9/11 at the World Trade Center when debris fell on him as he was following firefighters into the lobby of the North Tower. (*A famous photograph - you may remember it - shows a dead Fr. Judge, head slung to the side, being carried by four firemen, looking for all the world like a modern Pieta.*) On September 15th, over three thousand people attended his funeral, which was broadcast live around the world. He was hailed as a real hero. A film was made about his life, titled: *Saint of 9/11*.



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Who was this man? Mychal Judge was born in Brooklyn on May 11, 1933, the son of Irish immigrants. He lost his father when he was only six and missed him terribly, missed as, he often said, having his father to look up to. When he grew up he entered the Franciscans in 1954 and was ordained in 1961. He then served as pastor of two NJ parishes. In 1986, he was assigned to St. Francis of Assisi Church in Manhattan, and in 1992 he was named Chaplain to the NYC Fire Department. *"I always wanted to be a priest or a fireman,"* he said at the time. *"Now I'm both!"*

Within a short time, he gained the respect of every firefighter in NYC. It was easy to see why. Mychal was exceptionally outgoing, friendly, open and extroverted. His gift of gab was complimented by a rollicking sense of humor. He regularly talked to thousands of parishioners, the ill, firefighters, other Franciscans. One Franciscan recalled that he *"treated everyone like family."* Firefighters recalled him saying often, *"You are all doing God's work. Therefore, all your sins are forgiven."*



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When word came that a plane had crashed into one of the WTC towers on the morning of 9/11, Mychal immediately went downtown with other firefighters. Mayor Giuliani saw him rush by with several of them and grabbed him by the arm. "*Mychal, please pray for us,*" he said. "*I always do!*" Mychal responded with a nervous smile.

A documentary aired on national television showing him in the lobby area of the first tower minutes before it collapsed walking slowly, looking distressed and worried, his hands and lips moving slowly. Many presumed he was saying the rosary.

Moments later, he went outside to bless the bodies of a firefighter and a woman. Just as he removed his helmet, steel debris fell him, striking him in the back of the head, killing him instantly.

That photograph of firefighters carrying his body minutes later to nearby St. Peter's Church traveled around the world. He was 68 years old.



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But it must be said that this man of many good deeds did not achieve his life of grace without struggles, without the cross. He had to battle with two significant crosses: *Alcoholism* and *Same Sex Attraction*. He kept his vows, he kept his celibacy but it was a real struggle. Because of his own struggles, he worked sympathetically and compassionately with a gay Catholic Organization called Dignity. In the early days of AIDS, he ministered to dying men at St. Vincent's hospital. As to his alcoholism, at the time of his death he had been sober for 23 years and had saved countless people by taking them to AA meetings. One man recalls living in a box until Fr. Judge found him and rescued him.

Quite a man. The bottom line came from a fire captain who said, "*Fr. Mychal was the kindest guy in the world. He always had time for everyone.*" Mychal once told a friend that when he got up in the morning, allowed himself two minutes for "*a pity party, to feel*



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sorry for myself." After that, he went to work, helping and serving those in need, whomever he met.

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Jesus illustrated a life of loving sacrifice by lifting up the image of the cross, saying to both the crowd and his disciples, *"If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it."*

Many Christians choose to put a cross on their gravestone. There is a story in that stone, and it's the story of **SUFFERING LOVE**.

There can be no love without suffering because it always involves an element of self-sacrifice. If we choose to be buried under a cross, we are saying to the world that we have taken up our cross and followed Jesus. We have accepted that life involves both **love**



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and **suffering**, and that it certainly includes elements of **self-sacrifice**. It means that we have chosen to cook meals for the homeless and swing hammers to build affordable housing, or we have done other things to help people in need.

It makes the statement that we have denied ourselves some material comforts, so that we can leave behind a more stable and spiritually healthy world for our children and grandchildren.

Mychal Judge a flawed man, gave his life in loving kindness, selfless service and steadfast compassion. He is a witness to Gospel love, to the greatest love of all: *laying down our lives in love for others.*

I conclude with a prayer that he wrote:

Lord, take me where YOU want me to go.

Let me meet who YOU want me to meet.

Tell me what YOU want me to say,



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And keep me out of YOUR way.

Amen

St. Mychal Judge...pray for us!