

Bishop's Homily
BLUE and WHITE MASS
Cathedral of the Blessed Sacrament
September 11, 2010

Contrary to what some might think, - this Liturgy of the Eucharist, which we have termed as the "Blue and White Mass," is NOT about Penn State. Although, Joe Paterno might appreciate our prayerful thoughts, as he and his team go against Alabama today. Not knowing much about football, I do not even know if Penn State needs our prayers for this particular game.

(Actually, I am not sure that prayers help win games. Prayers can be of support to individuals in their effort to become good athletes. It is good athletes that win games.)

Nevertheless, this day for us is about a confrontation of a different kind. It, too, is about winning, - but, not simply a game or a championship in this life, - but, rather, about a victory that each one of us seeks to achieve in the eyes of our God.

If there is anything that we should have learned since that day of horror on nine-eleven, nine years ago, it is this: - the burning of Korans is not the way to resolve tension in a troubled world and thus eliminate terrorism.

If there is anything that terrorists should have learned since that day of infamy on nine-eleven, nine years ago, it is this: - destroying buildings and snuffing out innocent lives at the cost of one's own does not break the spirit of a free people.

If there is anything that a nation of free people should have learned since that day of self-sacrifice on nine-eleven, nine years ago, it is this: - basically, the human soul is good and discovers its true character at times of jeopardy, such as that on nine-eleven, nine years ago.

To celebrate that true character of the human soul is why we have gathered in a special way in this Cathedral church today, - in the presence of those who exemplify for us the nobility of that character. They are the men and women in blue, in white, and even in other colors.

While there is a need to remind ourselves, - there is no need to explain what the men and women who respond to calamities and are involved in providing our rescue, safety, and health do. What we need to do is to thank them for their willingness to jeopardize their lives for the lives of others and to give them the respect and hold them in the esteem that they deserve.

*[Would all **public safety personnel** please stand so that we can acknowledge you and your service to our communities.]*

Speaking of being grateful, - I would like to take this moment to thank the Knights of Columbus. They are gentlemen of the Church, and their providing us with this day bears witness to that fact.

One of the characteristics of public safety personnel is this: - in their concern for the welfare of their fellow human beings, they do so without judgment of the individual.

In the Gospel scene described for us by Saint Luke today, Jesus is criticized for not discerning the character of those to whom He wishes to show his charity. "This man welcomes sinners and eats with them," they complained. In answer, He goes on to explain to them by way of parables. In each of them, the Lord appears to depict for us individuals who set aside their own interests and that which is "safe" in the process of reaching out to those in need, - whether that be physical or emotional.

Was that not what Christ did when He allowed himself to experience death so that others might experience life? And, not the life that is temporary and limited, - but, that which is eternal and boundless. As the Apostle Paul reminds Timothy (and us) in one of the letters to him, "...Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners." [Second Reading for today]

Jesus' mission to humanity was to save, with the expectation that we would make a change in our lives, - in response. The people that Moses led across the desert to the Promised Land became depraved. Yet, at the pleading of Moses (one man's act of charity), God relented in his anger, expecting that there would be a change for the better in his people's response to his love.

We live in the Christian Era (which some, out of political correctness, prefer to call the "Common Era"). It is the Christian Era because the world is different than it would have been without Christ, - due to that tremendous act of charity on the part of God's Anointed One, when He risked his life to lose it in order that He might save ours.

As we acknowledge that fact (historical as it is), we do not do so at the exclusion of those who cannot accept that truth. (Jesus forgave those who were nailing him to the cross, even in the very process of their doing so.) Christ died that all might be free. Humanity was free to change for the better, - its soul purified.

Many reporters had called nine-eleven a "wake-up call". Of course, they were referring to our nation and the way that it does business. They were talking about security at airports. They were talking about our very notion of freedom.

I submit to you that it should have been an even greater "wake-up call" to us as individuals, as families, as parish faith communities, and as this Diocesan Church. It should have been a "wake-up call" as to the way that **we** do business, - as to the way that we conduct our relationship with our God.

If we should have learned anything since that day of infamy on nine-eleven, nine years ago, it should be this: - the price that has been paid (and, continues to be paid), is destined to bear fruit. In the face of tragedy, we find grace. Standing at the foot of our crosses, we find Christ hanging with us.

Indeed, it is important that we remember that day nine years ago. It is equally as important that we recognize the risks and sacrifices that our public safety personnel endure for our welfare in this place and in our time. We are grateful, - and not only we, but also generations yet to come.

It is the very spirit of Christ that these men and women immolate. While their vigilance and efforts make our lives better, - may the example of their souls change ours for the better, as well.