

Reflections On The Journey: September 11

Sometimes we think only liturgical consultants know how to truly create sacred space for liturgy. My recent visit to Ground Zero in New York City taught me otherwise. Perhaps a broader understanding of sacred space and liturgy would bring new meaning to our work.

Ground Zero.

Pilgrims come, witnessing the void.

Following the circuitous path around the destruction.

A liturgy of the dead for the living, a service of remembrance as we walk, pause, try to take it all in, walk some more.

Space once defined by two main structures, 110 stories of concrete, glass, and steel, gone.

Leaving hallowed ground.

Ground so sacred only those with hard hats and ID badges may enter the void, the emptiness.

But the view from the fence, the barricade, is close enough for me. I am as close to Ground Zero as my senses dare take me.

The smell of death hangs in the air. It catches in my throat, inescapable. It penetrates my skin. The drum of heavy equipment removing the physical remains of lives once lived, buildings once standing. The view is horrific, I can barely take it in, as I walk, pause, and pray.

Space once alive with hopes, dreams, joys and sorrows: the liturgy of life!

Now filled with the emptiness of death, loss, endings.

Fire and police workers are a priestly presence.

Directing, guiding, patient yet tired, never harsh.

Remembering life amidst death the path takes us to memorials a final witness to life and love, sorrow and grief.

Flowers, letters, candles, photos, stuffed bears, banners – ordinary stuff with extraordinary meaning.

Time to lament, pray, grieve and somehow take in the magnitude of the horror.

Stories of survival, rescue and dying. Stories I cannot really imagine. Then I recall the morning of September 11 and where I was and what I was doing as I watched: human bombs striking human targets, escape for some, then collapse and the towers and more were gone.

This liturgy of pilgrims, victims, survivors, fire, police, and aid workers continues 24/7.

Ground Zero, now sacred space, a place of meaning and mystery, remembrance and hope, hospitality and healing as the liturgy of life before September 11 is forever changed.

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