

SEPTEMBER 11th 25TH ANNIVERSARY OBSERVANCE
SETON HALL LAW SCHOOL
ST. THOMAS MORE CHAPEL
SEPTEMBER 10, 2026, 1:20 P.M.

READINGS: Wisdom 3:1-9
 Psalm 23
 John 6:37-40

HOMILY

Recently it has occurred to me I've crossed a threshold from merely studying history to remembering it. This thought amuses me. I identify with a high school history teacher in New York City whom I read about. As soon as his students returned to the classroom after the stunned pause in routines 25 years ago, he knew he needed to deal with 9/11 head-on. He began a series of classes dedicated to talking about what had just happened. He asked students to share their stories—when they first heard about what was happening, where they were, what they saw, whom they were with, how they were hearing the events explained. 9/11-as-personal-remembrance was part of his history class curriculum for many semesters following the events. Until one year, he noticed his students no longer had personal recollections. They were too young to remember the day and, eventually, not even born yet. That was the year this teacher says he began to teach the “history” of 9/11. And the discussion became academic.

This is largely where we find ourselves in today's observance. “We will never forget” is the mantra of September 11, 2001. But what can you do if you have no experiential memories of the day to begin with? Most of the students now in law school were not born yet 25 years ago. Hearing recollections from those who lived the events is valuable and I encourage you to seek out and listen to these. But I would also like to suggest at this observance we have recourse to the Hebrew notion of *remembrance* which Christianity inherited and embraced.

For our ancestors, remembrance, rooted in the verb *zakar*, was not just a passive mental recollection. Remembering meant bringing past events into the *present* and establishing a communal and personal *connection* with these events leading to *action*. Remembrance is active and efficacious here and now. The Jewish annual Passover Seder makes present each year the saving power of the LORD who frees his people. “Why *is* this night different from all other nights?” the youngest child asks, rather than why *was tonight different*.... Jesus said to his disciples, “Do this in *memory* of me,” and every time the Eucharistic meal is celebrated his presence is made real. No matter that no one alive today was with Moses in the exodus or with Jesus at the Last Supper. When the community remembers, its *values* are formed and *action* is undertaken here and now.

At this 25th Anniversary Observance we actively create a connection with everyone in the Twin Towers of the World Trade Center and the halls of the Pentagon, with the passengers of flights 11, 175, and 77, whose planes the hijackers used to hit their targets, and with the passengers of flight 93 who overwhelmed the terrorists and crashed their plane in a field in Shanksville, Pa., rather than into a target in Washington D.C.

We connect with first responders at all three locations who died doing their jobs, and with countless others who worked selflessly for months in the ruins at first to find survivors and then to recover remains. The cross on the altar was fashioned from the iron of a World Trade Center girder by a man named Tom McHale. He was a Port Authority detective by day and an ironworker by night. Tom is a friend of the law school. Like hundreds of others, he is now suffering from 9/11-related illnesses. More people have died from illnesses resulting from 9/11 than died that day. We actively pray for Tom and for them. We also honor and thank so many men and women who volunteered for military service to protect our country, who together with their families have made great sacrifices during the past 25 years.

Ultimately up to each of us is how remembering September 11, 2001, will change us. But one thing I think is certain, none of us is unfazed by the events of that day. A Jewish prayer written in 1970 by Rabbis Sylvan Kamens and Jack Riemer was often read in the months following at memorial services of all faiths. Whether or not you have personal memories of the day, keeping in mind the dynamic of remembrance, consider this prayer.

At the rising sun and at its going down; We remember them.

At the blowing of the wind and in the chill of winter; We remember them.

At the opening of the buds and in the rebirth of spring; We remember them.

At the blueness of the skies and in the warmth of summer; We remember them.

At the rustling of the leaves and in the beauty of the autumn; We remember them.

At the beginning of the year and when it ends; We remember them.

As long as we live, they too will live, for they are now a part of us as We remember them.

When we are weary and in need of strength; We remember them.

When we are lost and sick at heart; We remember them.

When we have decisions that are difficult to make; We remember them.

When we have joy we crave to share; We remember them.

When we have achievements that are based on theirs; We remember them.

For as long as we live, they too will live, for they are now a part of us as... We remember them.