

Gripped but Not Squeezed

The One-Year 9/11 Anniversary

Preached by Mother Renee, September 8, 2002

Wednesday will be a year since the Islamic Terrorist, led by Osama Bin Laden, struck that terrific and tragic blow against us on our own soil. Most of the visible signs of rubble has been removed but the scars are still there and for many of us the wound that we have today is almost as raw as it was a year ago. In typical North American fashion we have relived the moments from every conceivable angle and have had it examined inside out with virtually no thought left unexamined. Some of us have needed that attention to detail, that minute examination in order to try to make sense out of what possibly makes no sense at all. So we have lived through 9/11 and now we are living through its one-year anniversary.

The one-year anniversary suggests to me a time for reflection and not just a reliving the experiences of that day as if the day has become a moment frozen in time. Because time hasn't stood still and we have moved on even as we have also been changed forever by what has taken place. How have we been changed?

How have we been changed? What strikes me immediately by this question is its passive nature. In this instance whatever changes we have undergone as a result of the event, they were not changes we either sought or requested. Whatever changing we might have done were done out of reaction or response. In a sense we felt or still feel compelled towards change, as if our lives, our safety and our peace of mind requires it. And because we are not children and because we are the United States of America, the world superpower, being forced to do anything by anyone feels like a huge imposition, something not to be tolerated easily. And we've been forced to change.

Some of the changes we've undergone are readily apparent. Public events and public places generally have greater security so armed law enforcement officers, military or civil, are more visible. We have learned to travel through life, especially on public transportation, with a higher level of awareness about whom we are traveling with and what the other person is doing. We have come to

Gripped but Not Squeezed

The One-Year 9/11 Anniversary

Preached by Mother Renee, September 8, 2002

expect greater delays in our movement in order to accommodate the need for increased security for the common good and all our safety. Those are some of the visible changes we have undergone. But what about the less visible ones?

I will mention just one but I'm positive that over the course of the next week or two more than a few experts will explain to us in great detail all the psychological and physiologically changes we have undergone since 9/11. It seems that the insecurity we feel as a result of the randomness and unpredictableness of the terrorist attack magnifies the other threats we feel towards our safety and the safety of our families. The result is that we live in a generally heightened state of fear and alarm and this heightened level becomes our baseline position for experiencing the world on a daily basis.

As individuals and as a nation we are still in mourning over what happened a year ago. But what are we mourning? Are we mourning the deaths of over 3000 people in a span of a few hours? Perhaps we're mourning another type of death-which I will call for the sake of a better name-the death of our innocence. In experiencing what we did and the way we did it, we have lost our ability to ignore how others in the world live with similar threats to their personal security. We can no longer cite innocence and claim that our lack of personal awareness made it impossible for us to respond to others who also experience loss of control and security. We now know, first hand, what living under a threat like can do to a person.

Life has changed for us and I hope that we are just beginning to grasp the full extent and implications for the change. But change, as we all we know, is never easy whether it's a change we've initiated or not. Change is troublesome and change is difficult. In light of this I'd like to offer a few suggestions about what we might do in the coming days.

The first thing I'd suggest we do is breath. Inhale deeply and slowly. And as we breath we should remind ourselves that what we may see as a threat to American freedom is not a threat to our

Gripped but Not Squeezed

The One-Year 9/11 Anniversary

Preached by Mother Renee, September 8, 2002

Christian freedom and Christian freedom, afterall, is of lasting significance while American freedom is not. Christian freedom is not tied into world politics but is our declaration that through God and because of Christ we are no longer bound by the threat of death and we are free to choose eternal life. But that choice, the choice of eternal life, is a choice for today as well as a choice for tomorrow. Our life is not to be lived hiding from what may happen, we are not to live in fear but are to live embracing the moment and the possibility of what will happen of what God will do.

Our focus then, is not on the loss we may have experienced but on the hope of what is to come. It is the miracle that will make today special and if, by chance, we never see the miracle, still we have hope and expectation with the knowledge that today is always a special day if for no other reason that it is a day lived with God.

Many years ago I took golf lessons from an old golf pro and I remember him trying to teach me how to hold a golf club. I had the tendency to grip the club so hard that I took away any hope that the club would be free enough to do the things it was designed to do. Dick, that was the pros name, use to tell me to hold the golf club as if I were holding onto a bird. He said that I would want to grip the bird firmly so that it couldn't fly out of my hand but at the same time I didn't want to hold the bird so tightly that I squeezed the life out of it. A firm grip on the club would allow the club to become an effective extension of my body; free to strike the ball in the way it was designed to do.

The idea of holding a golf club as if I were holding a bird has become for me a metaphor for how life is to be lived. We should hold onto life like we would hold onto a bird. Firmly but without squeezing. If we allow anything we might experience to rob us of our ability to live and enjoy life as fully as possible, if we allow anything or anyone to take us out of this moment of experiencing the richness of God through the world than our life is being squeezed. We are effectively squeezing the life out of life. Gripping life firmly means that we would be able to withstand the difficult times but

Gripped but Not Squeezed

The One-Year 9/11 Anniversary

Preached by Mother Renee, September 8, 2002

not let the difficult times dictate or limit our response to what we see around us and how we might respond to it. Gripping, not squeezing, my life means that I'm free to respond to every moment as if it were a new moment so that I am free to live life, to give and share who I am with others with a sense of Christian joy and in return receive Christian fulfillment.

Just as my goal as a golfer is for the golf club to become an extension of my body, my life as a Christian is meant to become an extension of the body of Christ and that cannot happen if I squeeze life rather than grip it. We should hold onto our life tightly enough so that we are always available to be used by God. If fear or insecurity or distrust or hatred overwhelms us than we are not useful, we are locked in a prison. To be free is to have a choice. When we are squeezed, choice is gone. Life is to be gripped but not squeezed. Like a bird.