Mass For Peace
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The Immaculate Conception Chapel bells tolled throughout the morning as the University of Dayton campus community remembered those who died in the Sept. 11 attacks eight years ago.

At a noon Mass for Peace, the Rev. Christopher Wittmann, S.M., director of campus ministry, asked the congregation to pray that Sept. 11 may someday come to symbolize "the victory of peace over violence in all of its forms."

The full text of his homily appears below the names of those the campus community remembered at today's Mass:

- Norma Steuerle, wife of Gene Steuerle ‘68
- Howie Gelling, brother of Debbie Gelling ‘97
- Todd Weaver, friend of Catherine Olszewski ‘75
- Randy Scott, father of Rebecca Scott ‘05
- Michelle Heidenberger, sister-in-law of Dick Heidenberger ‘72
- Joseph Lenihan, cousin of Patricia Hart of the honors and scholars program
- Thomas (Tom) Moody, friend of Nikki Tousley in religious studies
- The sister-in-law of James Judge of the School of Education and Allied Professions
- James Greenleaf, friend of Lisa Sandner of legal ffairs
- Kelly Ann Booms, friend of Joni Baldwin in the School of Education and Allied Professions
- Uncle of Thomas Shull ‘05
- Cousin of Jacqueline Kelly ‘04
- Alfonse Niedemeyer II ‘83
- Krisy Irvine Ryan ‘93
- Mary Lenz Wieman ‘80
- William Wilson ‘65
- David Wiswall ‘69
- Joseph Zuccala ‘68
- Glenn J. Travers
- Jeremy Gillick

Text of Father Chris Wittmann's Sept. 11, 2009, homily:
The horrendous terrorist acts of Sept. 11, 2001, have marked many of our lives, and the life of our nation, in a seemingly permanent way. Those who lost friends and relatives still grieve. We have experienced international terrorism on our own soil. A good deal of our sense of security has been lost. Our nation is mired in two wars which developed in the wake of the horrors of that day. And whatever your opinion about the justification for those wars, it is undeniable that they have taken far more lives and caused far more suffering than that one day eight years ago.

The grief at loss of life and health, home and security, for both soldiers and citizens, here and in many other parts of the world, continues. Terrorism continues. And we do not yet seem to know how to stop it.

For many of us, that day eight years ago is a dividing line in our personal and national history. Life before Sept. 11, 2001, seemed different than life after it. How should we remember and observe this anniversary in light of our faith in Jesus Christ?

There will be many patriotic ceremonies today, remembering the fallen and honoring the heroic action of police officers and firefighters (many of whom, especially in New York City, were Catholic) who lost their lives trying to save others. Ceremonies will honor those who continue to risk their lives for our safety in the military and as first responders in our cities. These observances of loss, heroism and bravery are noble and good. But we are called to something more than patriotism and bravery by our liturgy and our faith today.

There are other observances that will take place, less noble than these. For example, songs will be played on the radio — songs written shortly after that day in 2001 that are little more than crude attempts to stir up vengeance and vigilante justice, wrap it in the flag and disguise it as patriotism. Ironically, those who revel in these songs fail to recognize that terrorism itself is a form of vengeance and vigilante justice. Others will use this anniversary to reinforce stereotypes, prejudices and hatreds against Muslims, Arabs, anyone from the Middle East, anyone with dark skin or features different from themselves, anyone who is a recent immigrant. These sentiments, which far too often get confused and mingled with our Sept. 11th anniversaries observances, dishonor those who lost their lives; they dishonor those who continue to risk their lives in the struggle for peace and justice within the rule of U.S. and international law. These sentiments dishonor the best character of our nation. We, in this liturgy and by our faith, are certainly called to something other than the sentiments of vengeance, hatred, prejudice or racism.

We are called to remember that God, the exalted and eternally living Holy One dwells not with those who seek vengeance, but with those who are crushed and dejected in spirit. Our God comes to revive the hearts of the crushed. God, the Creator who gave us life, comes to comfort those who mourn, Isaiah says. Despite our rebellious ways, God will heal us, and lead us to peace, for those far off and those near. The Lord speaks peace to God’s people, the psalm says, and kindness, and justice and truth. The gospel reminds us that this is a peace that the world does not give, a peace that the world cannot give. It is God’s gift, promised by Jesus, sent from the Father through the Holy Spirit. It is this peace, and truth, and justice and kindness to which we are called today as we remember the terrible events of eight years ago.

And this year, Sept. 11 falls on a Friday. This is the day of the week on which Catholic Christian tradition remembers Jesus’ death. Much was made of the fact that a small piece of steel framing resembling a cross remained standing in the rubble of the Twin Towers. More than 20 years ago, the U.S. bishops, in their pastoral letter on peace, invited all U.S. Catholics to continue fasting from meat on Fridays, even outside of Lent, as a prayer for peace. And since it is clear that we still are a long way from peace in our world, it seems that this would be a fitting way to remember those who died eight years ago, a fitting way to observe Sept. 11th. Perhaps we need more fasting for peace, and less patriotic bravado.

The cross, on which Jesus died, eventually became a sign of victory, of Christ’s victory over death and of our eventual sharing in that victory — we who have been baptized into his death, and so into his resurrection.

On this Sept. 11, on this Friday, let us pray that someday Sept. 11 will come to symbolize other victories. Not the victory of the U.S. over those who oppose us; not the victory of the West over other parts of the world, not victory of Christianity over any other religion, not the victory of democracy over other forms of government, or of one political ideology over another. Rather, may it come to symbolize the victory of trust in God over fear of our enemies; the victory of consolation over grief; the victory of hope over despair; the victory of compassion over hatred; of love over indifference; of peace over violence in all of its forms; of God’s love over death. From the Christian viewpoint, these victories cannot be reached without first journeying with Jesus to the cross; to our own Good Friday. And on the cross, our vengeance is quenched and replaced with compassion.

Let us end with Jesus’ words to us in the gospel today:

Peace, I leave with you, my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives, do I give it to you. Do not let your hearts be troubled or afraid.