



BE PREPARED!
It was exquisitely beautiful early that morning 21 years ago. A crystal clear blue sky, vibrant sunlight bringing all colors to life, and crisp cold autumn in the air. The long commute to New York City was quiet at that hour. The subway from Grand Central Station took me to my destination: a skyscraper at the southern tip of Manhattan Island.

A friend called the office to tell me a plane had hit one of the World Trade Center towers. Assuming it was a small private plane, I took the elevator down to see what had happened. I wasn't prepared.

The elevator stopped on the 26th floor, the cafeteria floor with windows all around, and a weeping woman entered the elevator. Sobbing, she said that she had just seen another plane hit the second tower. She wasn't prepared. Chaos reigned in the lobby and front plaza of the building. It was announced that the building was to be evacuated, so we all went to retrieve our belongings and left. We weren't prepared.

In the distance, fire and black smoke were billowing out of both towers. Walking around the building for a better view I saw little dots falling off the towers... and realized that they were actu-

ally people. Some had tried to climb down to safety, but didn't make it; others jumped rather than burn. Film footage showed the Firemen in the World Trade Center lobby. Their Chaplain winced and said prayers as each falling body hit the ground or roof with a shattering bang.

Battery Park was very crowded. It gave a very clear and close view of the burning towers. Soon there was a hellish groan and the top floor of the first tower fell with a boom onto the floor beneath it. Then they fell in turn with a boom onto the next, and so on and on until the entire falling building disappeared in a huge cloud of smoke, while dust and debris swept over us. We didn't know if the building would or could fall on us. Pandemonium erupted and people fled for the street, screaming in terror. No one was prepared.

Making my way through the crowd, I crossed the street and entered the Elizabeth Ann Seton Shrine inside Our Lady of the Rosary church. Outside was chaos. Inside was an oasis of sanity and holiness. Crowded with people seeking solace, some injured and others lined up to phone loved ones, for cell phone service had been lost, all were in shock. In the midst of all this, a saintly young man of Italian descent stood at the altar by the Tabernacle leading

a Rosary. The perfect antidote to all the evil outside. He was prepared.

An elderly construction worker with the map of Ireland on his face was lying by a wall. He had been injured by falling debris and was bleeding. He radiated sanctity. In calm and peace, he said how happy he was to have gone to Mass early that morning and prayed his Rosary. He was unmistakably a saint, and so was prepared for anything.

All subway and bus services were shut down. The walk was long and hot from the southern tip of Manhattan to Grand Central Station midtown. My firm gave out gym towels, which we soaked in water to wrap around our faces to keep the ubiquitous dust and acrid stench out of our lungs during our long trek north.

Along the way was a wonder. New Yorkers, not normally known for their warmth and kindness, were wonderfully charitable to each other in this crisis. Those of us covered in dust were well taken care of. A young man of West African descent had put up a table with cups of water on the sidewalk. His eyes revealed that he knew Christ very well. He was prepared.

Halfway to Grand Central, I grabbed some food and ate in the crowded Union Square Park. All wondered if more attacks were coming. An F-16 screamed overhead. Everyone cheered.

Eventually I caught a commuter train at Grand Central station. All of us crammed within it were in shock. We weren't prepared. After arriving home, I went to church for a special service. A number of

families had lost loved ones that morning. Such sadness, such loss. Thanks be to God for His One True Church and His Real Presence in the Tabernacle.

Local news outlets showed numerous groups in New York and New Jersey who were members of the "Religion of Peace" joyfully celebrating the fall of the two towers. The footage somehow never made it to the mainstream networks or newspapers. It was surreal.

Lower Manhattan was closed for two weeks. Clean up lasted many months. As did the dust, the stench of the disaster, and the millions of scattered papers that had fallen with the towers and blown all over the city. Trucks relentlessly hauled away debris and giant twisted steel girders.

Volunteers from all over the country joined in the search for survivors. Aside from a few miraculous stories of saved lives, the search results were beyond grim. The "Cross at Ground Zero," was discovered in the ruins of the World Trade Center two days later, and blessed by a Franciscan priest. Each Sunday over the next ten months, he celebrated Mass under its arms for First Responders, construction workers, family members of the victims, troops heading to Afghanistan and others. A great sign of hope and grace amidst the carnage.

Nevertheless, with few exceptions, neither New Yorkers, nor the American people were prepared. What happened 21 years ago was a wake up call. It reminded us that we are not in control of our own lives. It reminded us we don't know when we will meet our end. It reminded us that it would be wise to be prepared for anything that might come our way. Such reminders are especially appropriate now as our nation, the world, and our Church are all presently undergoing crisis after crisis. It appears we are living within one of those rare, major turning points in world history, if not the worst crisis in history. Today, there are other kinds of great edifices that are burning and falling down. The spiritual combat is intense. Be prepared.

But *how* can we be prepared? The answer is simple: by striving to become saints. Like the elderly



construction worker in the Shrine. He was a saint, and therefore ready for anything at all. How do we become saints? Cast off works of darkness. Cultivate Virtue. Live not by lies. Do not tolerate lies. Be wise as serpents, but gentle as doves. Build a network of trustworthy friends and family to support you in your faith.

Frequent the Sacraments. Pray always. Read Scripture prayerfully. Put on the whole Armor of God. Put on the Lord Jesus Christ.

Trust totally in Him and the unfathomable ocean of His Divine Mercy. Completely abandon yourselves to Divine Providence. Love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself (Lk 10:27).

Forgive. Be merciful. As the Lord Jesus says, “Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who

abuse you. ...And as you wish that men would do to you, do so to them” as did the Good Samaritan in the Parable.

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So, for God Almighty’s greater glory and the eternal salvation of a countless multitude of souls, be prepared!

