

Dear friends,

How much harm can a person do before it's impossible to forgive? How evil can the actions of a group of people be before we are morally right to refuse to forgive them? Is it possible that those who carried out the terrorist attacks ten years ago can be forgiven for what they did?

To be sure, it's a lot easier to forgive a child who breaks a window than to forgive someone who commits the sin of murder. In the matter of a few moments' time, 20 terrorists killed nearly 3,000 U.S. citizens on our soil. We must never forget what they did, but we can, hopefully in time, forgive them. Why should we do this? In very simple terms, we must do this because we are a nation that uses the word "Christian" as a foundation characteristic of who we are. As Christians our lives are rooted in the gospel and the gospel, which is the proclamation of the good news of God's love, carries a radical message of forgiveness. If we as a Christian nation are to be true to ourselves, forgiveness is the natural response to the 9-11 attacks.

There were people who grew up here in Northern Illinois who died in the attacks. We know families who were profoundly impacted by what happened. The emotions we carry in remembering that day touch our lives in painful ways even ten years later. But we have to ask ourselves this question as a nation: How do we want to be defined, as a nation of forgiveness and peace? Or, do we want to be defined as a nation of vengeance and war? If we are indeed a "Christian nation", there is no choice. We must be true to ourselves and to the gospel which calls us to forgive all sins.

As we look back on the past ten years to see what we have accomplished on battlefields in Afghanistan and Iraq, can we say that we have come closer to resolving the events of Sept. 11, 2001? I understand the inevitability of war as a response to what happened. However, once the fighting stops, and ultimately it must, the need to forgive will remain, if for no other reason than that we are a Christian nation rooted in the gospel command to forgive.

May God bless you, and may God bless America.

Fr. Tim Seigel