



St. Luke's East Hampton Reflections from Fr. Ben Sept. 11, 2025

From the Rector

It's 9/11. Do you remember those bumper stickers that said, "Never Forget"? I haven't. For at least a dozen years in a row, I played my horn in 9/11 remembrance concerts that honored first responders and the fallen. The year after 9/11 I preached at the American Cathedral in Paris and had the honor of seeing a New York City firetruck park right in front of the church before it led the Bastille Day Parade down the Champs Elysee. Just last year I led a 9/11 ceremony at Fort Wadsworth on Staten Island, overlooking New York Harbor. I can't imagine what it was like for those who lived or worked in New York City that day. I was in the suburbs of Washington, DC. While Shari was then working down town at the Water Reid Army Hospital – and with her team would be sent to help families from the Pentagon a few days later – I stayed at my K-8 school, reassuring students that their parents were OK and telling kindergartners that, no, planes were not coming to hit the two towers of the church and the school.

My question, 24 years out, is what we learned through all that. In the days and weeks after 9/11 there was a moment when we were truly bonded together, not because of a common enemy but because of a common love and compassion for one another, for our communities, and our country. The whole world was on our side. People came back to church. Churches reached out to mosques and Christians to their Muslim neighbors. In the government, a whole new department and a whole new National Incident Management System (including a FEMA-led Incident Command System in which I have been trained) were created, so that local communities, states, federal agencies, and military would build trust between one another, have strong connections and communication, and work together well should a tragedy strike again in the future. All that was good. We, however, quickly violated the most frequent command in the Bible: "Do not be afraid." We became afraid and let fear feed our basest of instincts. Rather than reconciliation we sought revenge, even to the point of starting wars with countries that were not involved and letting those who funded the terrorists go completely free. We let our emotions strip away our moral and spiritual foundations, planting the seeds for everything that is going on today.

Never forget. The challenge is to remember, not the grief, the anger, and the pain but that moment when we came together and the resilience, the spiritual resilience, that we experienced when we focused on things like love, compassion, and care and our faith in God and one another. That day created great cracks in our society and our souls. It also showed us how those things – how we, our nation, and our world – can be healed. The God who was with us that day is still here. The question of what happens next is up to us.