

WHAT DO WE PRAY FOR?

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I was watching television today while many people observed a few moments of silence to honor the victims of last Tuesday's tragedy. Situated far away, as I am, from those people (I live in Italy, near the birthplace of Saint Francis of Assisi), I joined them in spirit. Later, in spirit, I participated in the inspiring services held in Washington D.C. and in other cities across America. I was proud to think I belong to a nation dedicated to truth and God.

During those moments of silence, I saw several people glancing around as if asking themselves, "What do I do in this silence?" Obviously, the answer was, "Pray." I found myself, however, asking along with them, What should I pray *for*? Surely there are many others these days asking that same question.

Though I wanted very much to pray, this drama is so vastly complex that, lacking a clear focus, no prayer of mine, surely, could be very effective.

And then I thought of the prayer attributed to Saint Francis of Assisi: "Lord, make me an instrument of Thy peace." And I thought, What better prayer than this for such a time?

Assuming God answers our prayers—and experience shows me that He does—what prayer would He heed? Surely, petitions alone can have little power under such circumstances. If God exists—and I haven't the slightest doubt that He does—and if He loves us (don't even human parents love their erring children?), surely He requires no boost of love from me! His grief for people's suffering must be infinitely deeper than my own. Surely He also takes into account, and grieves over, the hatred and intolerance in the perpetrators of this tragedy. If Satan exists—and, again, I see no other explanation for that consciousness which sets people against every principle of love and truth—those acts cannot be called human, merely: They have to be considered satanic.

So how do I pray? Do I pray with love for those who were thrust out of life so violently? with compassion for their families and loved ones? in support of our president and political leaders? in anger against our attackers, with a prayer for vengeance? soul-searchingly, for my own understanding? fearfully, for the world's future stability? Could a few moments of prayer possibly settle these many issues even in my own mind? The silence, and the divine services, were uplifting, but alas they also increased my sense of helplessness.

And then I thought of the words of Saint Francis of Assisi. And I realized what all of us can do: *We can lift up our hearts in a prayer to become worthy instruments of God's light, love, and wisdom.*

The issues we face are bewildering in their sheer diversity, but one thing emerges clearly: They are far greater than we. Humanity is caught in a struggle between good and evil: between God (define Him as you will) and Satan (define him, again, as you will). It is a struggle between light and darkness, and between faith and people's attempts to destroy human faith in everything. If we meet hatred with anger, and bigotry with intolerance, we assume to ourselves those very emotions which were responsible for this disaster. There is no need, spiritually, to love those terrorists. It is enough that we love God. We may love them as His children, but their pardon and salvation lies between their souls and God. Our concern must be for those who are suffering.

We owe it to ourselves, and to all humanity, to do what we can. Our duty is to act firmly, even sternly—as, during a forest fire, a swath of trees may be cut down to prevent the fire from spreading. No world scripture counsels spinelessness. It is sufficient that we not be drawn into hating others. Our concern must be the threat posed by their actions to the rest of humanity.

What should I pray for? I pray that I become an ever-clearer channel for God's grace. I pray also for my fellow human beings, that they become ever stronger in God's light.

The real war today is not military. It is a conflict between faith and the destruction of faith, between love and hatred. What can win this war is for millions of people to offer their lives up as channels of God's truth and justice. This offering is one that each of us has the power to make.

Each of us has the power to make an offering to God of this simple prayer: "Lord, *use* me! Let me channel your love impersonally to all." Divine Love is a force. It does not succumb weakly to evil, but opposes it with power to destroy it utterly—if possible, by transforming it into kindred love, but if necessary by cutting a swath through the forest in order that countless other trees be saved. If we understand that by loving rightly it is *God's* love we express, He will be able, through us, to uplift the world's consciousness. For that is how He works: through instruments; very seldom directly.

An ocean consists of countless drops. Although a raindrop adds but little moisture to the earth, once it unites with many other drops a mighty current is created which flows down to the sea. We too, united with God's will, can help mightily in the struggle between the forces of light and of darkness. Thus, we may be instrumental in ushering in a period of peace and universal understanding.

