

YOUTH GUY RAMBLINGS

By Chris Rupar, Aka the Youth Guy

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25 Years and 11 Days After...

"Lord, take me where You want me to go;
Let me meet who You want me to meet;
Tell me what You want me to say; and
Keep me out of your way." - Father Mychal Judge



It was first hour at Century Junior High School (as it was known back then) and I was sitting in algebra. The early periods are always on the quiet side as students rev up for the day - and we were diligently working on our assignments for that session. Mrs. Larson broke the silence with a sentence that I didn't totally comprehend at the moment - but it's stuck with me all these years later;

"A plane ran into the World Trade Center in New York..."

We turned our heads towards her desk which was behind us - and nobody said a word. It's hard to imagine now but "World Trade Center" didn't immediately invoke the images of the two towers as it does today... Afterall, Mrs. Larson used the tone that it was an accident - so we slowly turned back to our equations. Nobody wanted to leave any undone problems that would turn into homework.

It was 7:46AM here in Forest Lake, Minnesota...

First hour ended at 8:00AM - and we funneled into the hallways to make the most of our five minutes of passing time. I walked down the crowded halls towards the music department for my next class and didn't give much mind to the update Mrs. Larson had shared with us that chilly morning. I had second hour band with my mom, Mrs. Rupar as my teacher.

Somewhere in that five-minute walk towards second hour band, United Airlines Flight 175 crashed into the South tower... it became frighteningly clear this was no accident.

I'll never forget the look on my mom's face when I walked into the band room... Like all of our teachers that day - she was burdened with the difficult task of explaining the unexplainable to a room full of kids...

We played our instruments that day... just as we did the day before and the day after. Rehearsed our songs and melodies as Mrs. Rupar tried to bend the wrong notes into something beautiful... There wasn't a lot of talking that day - nobody knew what to say. So, we played.

Second hour ended at 9:00AM... while we rehearsed in stunned silence, American Airlines Flight 77 struck the Pentagon in Washington, DC.

"It's getting really bad..." My mom told me as our eyes met when the bell chimed. But that was something everyone could FEEL... There was almost no need to verbalize it.

These were the days before cell phones and instant news updates. But word had begun to spread rapidly by now. People were terrified...

Our Principal Dr. Ben Lewis' voice came over the loudspeakers as third hour began. I remember his voice being one of calm and composure... He was reassuring and kind and told us that here in Forest Lake, Minnesota we were safe...

The rest of the school day feels like a blur. I remember people crying from confusion and fear... I remember the announcement that after school activities were cancelled. Which for me meant no football practice. And I remember getting home and watching the world change forever on the tv.

I was glued to it - late night turned into early morning, and I kept watching to try to make sense of what we were seeing. Even 25 years later I'm still trying... We all are, I think.

"Don't stay up too late, CJ..." My fellow night-owl dad told me as he headed upstairs. "Love you, goodnight." He said as he shut the lights off in the stairwell behind me. And there I sat... "How could this happen?" I'd think to myself... But nobody knew.

A quarter century ago...

I still get stopped in my tracks by the video clips of the coverage from September 11th, 2001. I still remember the feeling at the Junior High School that morning... And how everything changed in the world afterwards.

This year was no different...

I scrolled by a video clip of the first responding Firefighters gathered in the lobby of the towers... They were stoic and calm - awaiting their orders in the midst of unthinkable chaos all around them. Within those heroes was a much older gentleman wearing a clergy collar and clutching a rosary. In the clip that I saw, he was reciting a prayer to himself. His lips and mouth were moving but no sound was coming out... The type of prayer we pray when in a moment of desperation.

It didn't take many google searches to find out who this man was... Father Mychal Judge - the New York City Fire Department Chaplain.



When American Airlines Flight 11 hit the North Tower, Father Mychal rushed from his friary at St Francis of Assisi Church to ground zero... He went there to help in any way that he could... He prayed over the injured... He prayed over the deceased... He prayed for protection of the first responders... He offered comfort to all those around him. Just like those first-responders - Father Mychal ran towards the danger. But that's who everyone always knew him to be....

"People would often say about him, when you talk to him it was like you were the only person before him," said Fr. Kevin Mullen, a Franciscan friar of the Province of Our Lady of Guadalupe and former president of Siena University in Loudonville, New York, where he currently teaches.

"He engaged you fully; he was not looking around for who he could talk to next. He was fully present to you," Mullen told OSV News. "And that's what made a difference to a lot of people about Mychal Judge — they could talk to him, bare their souls, share their good news, share their bad news. And he was going to be there for them." He was there... He was present. (Author Kimberley Heatherington - ncronline.org)

This was the man with the clergy collar in that video clip... One I had never seen before - even after all these years. Father Mychal Judge in the lobby of the North Tower of the World Trade Center... Praying. Present. His last moments on earth...



When the South Tower collapsed - Father Mychal was struck by debris and lost his life.

He was the first recorded casualty of the September 11th attacks. There would be 2,976 more.

On the evening of September 10th, 2001... Father Mychal delivered his final homily to a room full of New York Firefighters. I was able to find a video clip from that evening's service. Father Mychal feels like someone you've always known. He had a calming, Christ-like demeanor. Suddenly, this man that I'd been researching was there speaking in living color on my screen. A clip I had never seen.... all these years later.

It was a truly beautiful message, and he concluded with these prophetic words;

"That's the way it is. Good days. And bad days. Up days. Down days. Sad days. Happy days. But never a boring day on this job. You do what God has called you to do. You show up. You put one foot in front of another. You get on the rig and you go out and you do the job – which is a mystery. And a surprise. You have no idea when you get on that rig. No matter how big the call. No matter how small it is. You have no idea what God is calling you to. But he needs you. He needs me. He needs all of us.

The retirees – He needs your prayers. He needs your stopping by occasionally to give strength and support and to tell the stories of the old days. We need the house and to those of you that are working now, keep going. Keep supporting each other. Be kind to each other. Love each other. Work together and do what you did the other night and the weeks and the months and the years before and from this house, God's blessings go forth in this community. It's fantastic!

What great people. We love the job. We all do. What a blessing that is. A difficult, difficult job and God calls you to it. And then He gives you a love for it so that a difficult job will be well done. Isn't He a wonderful God? Isn't He good to you? To each one of you? And to me! Turn to Him each day. Put your faith and your trust and your hope and your life in His hands, and He'll take care of you and you'll have a good life.

And this house will be a great, great blessing to this neighborhood and to this city.

Amen."

'Keep going... Keep showing up... He needs you.' Those words will stay with me forever... Just like Mrs. Larson's during first hour math 25 years ago.



A prayer was found in Father Mychal's pocket on September 11th, 2001. It read like this;

Lord, take me where You want me to go;
Let me meet who You want me to meet;
Tell me what You want me to say; and
Keep me out of your way.

Words to live by... forever.

Just keep going... Keep showing up... HE needs you.

God bless you, friends.

Chris Rupar, The Youth Guy

**In memory of Father Mychal Judge, the heroic first responders, and all who lost their lives on September 11th, 2001 - We will never forget.*



*If you have any questions, you can message me
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