Friday 11 September, 2015
Cathedral of Christ the King
Atlanta, GA

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Archbishop of Atlanta

BLUE MASS

Fourteen years ago on this very day, as the entire world stood in total disbelief at the horrors that had visited our nation, that same world also marveled at the incredible generosity and bravery of the first responders in the New York region, at the Pentagon, and in a field in Shanksville, Pennsylvania who risked and too often surrendered their own lives in search and rescue missions to find those who had been injured and killed as a result of that tragedy.

These were ordinary men and women who had left their homes that day anticipating nothing more surprising than routine encounters with traffic snarls, a few petty crimes, and a medical emergency or two, but were then swept up in the greatest act of violence ever to occur in our nation. They had begun their day with anticipating the ordinary and were then caught up in the extraordinary display of heroism and bravery.

None of us will ever forget where we were and what we were doing on that day. We have all bookmarked our lives according to those moments and scenes. We pray this day to spare our nation, or any nation, a repeat of such horror and sorrow. We must also pray today for those who daily continue to provide protection and security for our community here in North Georgia. We pray that none of you or any of your coworkers will ever be called upon to render such bravery as did your colleagues fourteen years ago in New York City, DC or Pennsylvania.

We know that each one of you begins his or her day on duty with the same sense of ordinariness that marked the dawn of September 11th fourteen years ago for the First Responders in those places who were suddenly caught up in unspeakable horror. There is an anticipated routineness that should mark each day of your service to the people entrusted to your care. Still you know that your routines can change drastically with little or no notice. Perhaps they will not change as catastrophically as did the lives of the First Responders fourteen years ago, but they can
tragically change nonetheless. Sadly, we continue to experience an increase in violence in the streets of our nation. Ordinary people have recently become victims of hatred, racism, fear, terror, and discrimination. Everyday people – documented and undocumented alike - have been caught in the cross-fire of violence unfortunately sometimes launched by those who were charged to protect them and to maintain security within the community.

Occasionally now, even Frist Responders and dedicated Public Servants have themselves become victims of senseless violence and hatred. This is a sorry condition to be sure. We pray this day for all those who have become statistics and causes of despair and chaos in our nation. We pray for a greater bond of trust between all of our citizens and those who are charged with their safety.

Fourteen years ago, we were inspired by the courage and generosity of the first responders who then stood as beacons of hope for an entire nation and world. We pray this day for the United States of America as we continue to confront not only the violence of foreign terror, but the casual shredding of our fabric of unity and mutual respect. The bravery of those First Responders provided a rich feeling of hope to people of the United States of America. Today, we pray for your safety, for the deepening of your faith, your courage, your witness of justice. May all of us continue to respect, honor, and cherish the work that you do for the benefit of all. Amen!