Remembering 9/11: Twenty-Five Years Later

To the Clergy, Monastics, and Faithful of the Orthodox Church in America,

Beloved children in the Lord,

Today marks twenty-five years since the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. On this solemn anniversary, we remember in prayer the nearly three thousand men, women, and children who lost their lives at the World Trade Center, the Pentagon, and aboard United Airlines Flight 93, as well as the countless others, in America and around the world, whose lives were forever changed by the events of that day.

For many, the memory of that terrible day twenty-five years ago remains vivid: the confusion and fear of those first hours, the images of destruction etched in our minds like scars, and the grief of families who waited for loved ones who would never return home. Yet a quarter century has also brought the passing of time. A generation has now come of age with no personal memory of that day. For them, September 11 belongs to history. For others, especially those who lost family and friends, those who survived, and those first responders who continue to bear physical and emotional wounds, twenty-five years have not erased the pain. For some, indeed, the toll of that day is still being counted as the deaths from illnesses contracted by breathing in the ruins steadily increase.

In the Church remembrance is more than recalling the past. In prayer, we bring before God those who have fallen asleep, commending them to His mercy and asking that they be forever known and remembered by Him. We likewise reveal our own wounds to the Great Physician of souls and bodies and remember so that the tragedies of the past never become an excuse to harden our hearts or diminish our love for our neighbor.

Our world remains troubled and will stay so until Christ comes again in glory. We continue to hear of “wars and rumors of wars” (Matt. 24:6), of violence and bloodshed, of division among peoples, and of suffering borne by the innocent. Faced with these realities, it is tempting to give ourselves over to fear, anger, or despair. Yet our Lord tells us, “Let not your hearts be troubled; believe in God, believe also in me” (Jn. 14:1).

It is a spiritual help to us that each year our remembrance of September 11 comes just days before the feast of the Exaltation of the Precious and Life-giving Cross. The Cross reminds us that suffering and death do not have the final word. And the risen Christ, victorious over death, still bears the wounds of His Passion. When He appeared to His disciples after His Resurrection, He showed them His hands and His side (Jn. 20:20). His wounds were not erased by the

resurrection; rather, they have become signs of His victory, His mercy, and His boundless love for mankind.

So too, the wounds borne by individuals, families, communities, and nations need not become sources of bitterness or hatred. In Christ they can be offered to God and, through His grace, become occasions for compassion, repentance, and forgiveness. This is difficult work, but through the power of the Cross no wound is beyond the reach of divine love and no darkness can overwhelm the light of Christ.

On this twenty-fifth anniversary, may we remember all those who lost their lives on September 11, 2001. Let us pray for their families and friends, for the survivors, for the first responders and all who came to the aid of those in danger, and for all who continue to carry wounds from that day. Let us also pray for peace throughout the world, asking the Lord to preserve us from hatred and fear and to strengthen our faith in Him.

May the memory of those who lost their lives be eternal, and may the God of all consolation grant healing, peace, and hope to all.

Yours in Christ,

+Tikhon
Archbishop of Washington
Metropolitan of All America and Canada