



A MESSAGE FROM INTERIM PRESIDENT

Daisy Cocco De Filippis, Ph.D.

IN SORROW AND REMEMBRANCE

September 11, 2001.

It is difficult to look back on that clear blue morning and reconcile its beauty with the terrorist attacks that destroyed the World Trade Center and took the lives of almost three thousand New Yorkers.

All these years later, terror is still used to intimidate and to kill; the world is still torn apart by sectarianism, ignorance and greed. But something else remains the same – and serves as a necessary counterbalance to the horror unleashed on that day: the goodness of the human heart, which was witnessed over and over again on September 11 and the days that followed.

We remember those who died on that fateful day, and we acknowledge the soldiers, firefighters, police, doctors, nurses, and civilians who came to the aid of their fellow New Yorkers.

In a divisive era, our acts of service and kindness unite us. When we realize that we are all dependent upon each other and celebrate our magnificent diversity, no reactionary force – from inside or outside of this great country – will ever break us apart.

We encourage your participation in one or all of the opportunities for a moment of silence and of prayer, in whichever form you do, for world peace.

- 8:46 a.m.: Hijackers crash Flight 11 into the north tower.
- 9:03 a.m.: Hijackers crash United Airlines Flight 175 into the south tower.
- 9:37 a.m.: Hijackers crash American Airlines Flight 77 into the Pentagon.
- 9:59 a.m.: The south tower collapses.
- 10:03 a.m.: Passengers launch a counterattack on hijackers aboard United Airlines Flight 93. The hijackers crash the plane into an empty field near Shanksville, PA.
- 10:28 a.m.: The north tower collapses.

I'd like to share this poem by the beloved African American writer and Nobel Prize Winner Toni Morrison. It speaks to the heart of the matter.

“The Dead of September 11”

Some have God's words; others have songs of comfort for the bereaved. If I can pluck courage here, I would like to speak directly to the dead – the September dead. Those children of ancestors born in every continent on the planet: Asia, Europe, Africa, the Americas...; born of ancestors who wore kilts, obis, saris, geles, wide straw hats, yarmulkes, goatskin, wooden shoes, feathers and cloths to cover their hair. But I would not say a word until I could set aside all I know or believe about nations, wars, leaders, the governed and ungovernable; all I suspect about armor and entrails. First I would freshen my tongue, abandon sentences crafted to know evil – wanton or studied; explosive or quietly sinister; whether born of a sated appetite or hunger; of vengeance or the simple compulsion to stand up before falling down. I would purge my language of hyperbole; of its eagerness to analyze the levels of wickedness; ranking them; calculating their higher or lower status among others of its kind.

Speaking to the broken and the dead is too difficult for a mouth full of blood. Too holy an act for impure thoughts. Because the dead are free, absolute; they cannot be seduced by blitz.

To speak to you, the dead of September 11, I must not claim false intimacy or summon an overheated heart glazed just in time for a camera. I must be steady and I must be clear, knowing all the time that I have nothing to say – no words stronger than the steel that pressed you into itself; no scripture older or more elegant than the ancient atoms you have become.

And I have nothing to give either – except this gesture, this thread thrown between your humanity and mine:
I want to hold you in my arms and as your soul got shot of its box of flesh to understand, as you have done, the wit of eternity: its gift of unhinged release tearing through the darkness of its knell.

Morrison, Toni. *Echoes*. September 13, 2001. p. 367-368

In sorrow and remembrance,

Daisy Cocco De Filippis, Ph.D.
Interim President

Office of the President
Hostos Community College
475 Grand Concourse, A-Building, Room 341, Bronx, NY 10451
718-518-4300 | PRESIDENTSOFFICE@hostos.cuny.edu

