



Arise

A reflection / letter to foster on pastoral and spiritual growth

By Bob Traupman / priest / writer

Vol. XXIII / No. 2 / October 2011

Vulnerable

An Arise Reprint of October 2001

*"... **You never know.** You never know what tomorrow will bring. Or for that matter, what the next moment will bring. The stability that you and I have acquired could be cut from under us at any moment. We could suddenly be fired from our job. We could have a heart attack as my priest/buddy Phil did at age 46 and, of a sudden, be gone."*

These words came from last month's *Arise* newsletter on "Uncertainty." How eerie they seem now in light of the terror that has gripped us all.

"Sudden events," Arise continues, "such as a car accident, a natural disaster, or the threat of terrorism can confront us with stress on every level. Kids who grow up in the West Bank of Jerusalem never know when a kickball game will turn deadly. How can people cope with that level of senseless uncertainty? Can Palestinian or Israeli children have any kind of normalcy? Will they be gun-shy all their lives?"

I am speaking of **BEING VULNERABLE**. Suddenly, our whole nation has become vulnerable with a gaping wound that will not be easy to heal, will not be easy to close. We have become vulnerable to violence and terror.

But we can do something valuable and important. We can grieve well for the tremendous loss that has happened to us. We can grieve with dignity and honor. This could be our finest hour. If we grieve well, so God will speak to our heart. We must be with and lift up those who have borne the weight of this tragedy, the suffering of the family members trying to find out some word about their loved ones. The courageous suffering of rescue workers so dedicated to their task. The suffering of all of us who have united our hearts in solidarity with those who experience terrible grief and loss.

To me, America's vulnerability to violence is not surprising. We have known as a nation that we have harbored

violence in our nation's soul. Many of us have a fascination

with violence. We play violent video games and watch violent movies. We're not satisfied unless these show utter destruction and devastation.

Being vulnerable, being wounded, can bring immense suffering. Indeed, perhaps for the first time, we can feel the suffering of so many peoples throughout the world who face the threat of violence every day. Perhaps our compassion can be deepened for those who have no relief from violence and who despair of ever living a normal life.

I'm afraid that we may not be protected again from violence without until we face the violence within. Perhaps that is true for our nation as it was true for me. Twenty years ago I was devastated in my soul; my life had collapsed in rubble. I had to realize that the healing of my soul was of utmost importance if the whole of my life was to be healed.

So we can tend to our nation's soul. **Being vulnerable can be a good thing; it can lead us to the One who can fortify us, who can be our rock, our refuge, our stronghold.** We can reflect on our sinfulness as a nation. As the world's only Superpower we sometimes think we are invincible. No wonder, then, that some would hate us because some of us sometimes use power to our own ends.

We must be willing to be humble. Our vulnerability, our wounds, can unite us with the rest of suffering humanity. And, that could be an immensely good thing.

Jesus "emptied himself and took the form of a slave, being born in the likeness of men." (Phil. 2:6-11) Jesus showed us that humility was a good thing for the human race.

Humility, then, is the key to healing the wounds of September 11, 2001. Not humiliation. Humility.

May we be consoled and strengthened by these scriptures:

"I consider the sufferings of the present to be as nothing

compared with the glory to be revealed in us. . . Yes, we know that all creation groans and is in agony until now. . .

The Spirit too helps us in our weakness, for we do not know how to pray as we ought." (Romans 8:18-27)

"If God is for us, who can be against us? . . . Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Trial or distress or persecution or hunger or nakedness or danger or the sword?" (Romans 8:31-39)

"The body is one and has many members, but all the members, many though they are, are one body. . . If one member suffers, all the members suffer with it. If one member is honored, all the members share its joy." (I Cor. 12:12-27)

"There is cause for rejoicing here. You may for a time have to suffer the distress of many trials; but this is so that your faith, which is more precious than the passing splendor of fire-tried gold, may by its genuineness lead to praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ appears." (I Peter 1:6-9)

Life has been scrambled for us in America. We have entered the refiner's fire. We have the opportunity to be cleansed and purified and strengthened so that we can find our security in God.

This is a time to think, a time to reflect on where we are as a nation and where we want to go.

Consumerism consumes the soul of America. We worship the almighty dollar. The World Trade Center symbolizes all this. We celebrate Christ's birth each year by buying and spending more than last year. Our economic growth is based on the premise that we will consume more and more and our GNP will forever increase. This is an illusion.

The rich grow richer and the poor grow poorer. The gap is widening -- 20% of the world's people consume 86% of the world's goods. (Center for Concern)

We must seek spiritual values first. We have the opportunity today to see that God is inviting us to rely on God first, on Wall Street second.

We must not escalate the hate that has been spewed upon us. There is no doubt that there are some who hate America. We do have enemies. And we are angry. And we must stop the violence. Stop it, not escalate it.

Again, I say, if we are to stop violence without we have to face the violence within.

We have to be very careful that we do not escalate the hate. We must not pre-judge all Arabs or all Muslims because of the evil intent of some individuals and a few gurus of terror and inhumanity. We will follow the rule of law carefully and

we will find and punish the ones who did this, the ones who supported this, and the ones who have harbored such hate.

And so may I revert to some words from last month's newsletter, which turned out to be prophetic:

"No human being can know for certain what the next moment will bring. Uncertainty is just part of life. No matter what the next moment will bring, we can be assured, if we have some faith and hope, that the presence of God in our life will give us the strength and the courage to hang on and hang in. God will give us the grace and the resources to deal with any life situation, no matter how difficult."

A Reflection Ten Years Later

We did not grieve well back then.

Not only that, we went to war to get rid of Saddam Hussein who had nothing to do with 9/11. Part of our present debt crisis is because of that war.

We spread hatred towards Muslims. The man who has taken care of my beautiful Mitsubishi Eclipse Spider is a devout Muslim. He has helped me understand another side of the people we're taught to hate.

We forgot what the Statue of Liberty stood for ~ to welcome immigrants to our shores. My father, grandparents and cousins were immigrants. How soon we forget.

We have different crises in America today.

Serious unemployment. The debt crisis. Disillusionment and anger over the way our government is managed in all three branches of government. And we're not turning to God.

Serious inflation is likely. Another Wall Street crash is likely. And I don't want to be the bearer of bad news but foreign governments are making "what if" provisions for a possible collapse of the U. S. dollar. **You never know . . .**

Since 2007, I have been inviting my readers to enter personal transformation for the sake of transformation of our country but I'm not sure who's listening.

In July as I watched the gridlock in Washington I was absolutely astonished at how dysfunctional our government has become. **Now is the time for real prayer. America, we need to find our soul again.**

In the Eucharist, we unite ourselves -- and all those we pray for -- with the suffering, death and resurrection of Jesus himself. Through him, we can be hopeful. There can be new life, a purer, more spiritual life for our nation; we can experience renewal and resurrection. But first we must tend to our wounds and confess our sins -- each of us and all of us.

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suffering. Indeed, perhaps for the first time, we can feel the suffering of so many peoples throughout the world who face the threat of violence every day. Perhaps our compassion can be deepened for those who have no relief from violence and who despair of ever living a normal life.

I am afraid that we may not be protected again from violence without until we face the violence within. Perhaps that is true for our nation as it was true for me. Twenty years ago I was devastated in my soul; my life had collapsed in rubble. I had to realize that the healing of my soul was of utmost importance if the whole of my life was to be healed.

So we can tend to our nation's soul. Being vulnerable can be a good thing; it can lead us to the One who can fortify us, who can be our rock, our refuge, our stronghold. We can reflect on our sinfulness as a nation. As the world's only Superpower we sometimes think we are invincible. No wonder, then, that some would hate us because some of us sometimes use power to our own ends.

We must be willing to be humble. To realize our vulnerability, our wounds, can unite us with the rest of suffering humanity. If we do that, that will be an immensely good thing.

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Humility, then, is the key to healing the wounds of September 11, 2001. Not humiliation. Humility.

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Again, I say, if we are to stop violence without we have to face the violence within. The official liturgical book, the Sacramentary, has us pray this prayer in the face of war:

Lord, remember Christ your Son who is peace itself and who has washed away our hatred with his blood. Because you love all people, look with mercy on us. Banish the violence and evil within us and by this offering restore tranquility and peace.

The liturgy is saying what I have been saying: if you want to banish violence without, ask God to banish violence within.

We have to be very careful that we do not escalate the hate. We must not pre-judge all Arabs or all Muslims because of the evil intent of some individuals and a few gurus of terror and inhumanity. We will follow the rule of law carefully and we will find and punish the ones who did this, the ones who supported this, and the ones who have harbored such hate. We are a law-abiding country. And we must be careful to abide by the law in the search of those who have the blood of Americans upon their souls.

And so may I revert to some words from last month's newsletter, which turned out to be prophetic:

"No human being can know for certain what the next moment will bring. Uncertainty is just part of life. No matter what the next moment will bring, we can be assured, if we have some faith and hope, that the presence of God in our life will give us the strength and the courage to hang on and hang in. God will give us the grace and the resources to deal with any life situation, no matter how difficult."

We can ease the burden of those who suffer by the power

of our prayer today. Jesus knows the immensity of suffering the world can feel. In the eucharist, we unite ourselves -- and all those we pray for -- with the suffering, death and resurrection of Jesus himself. Through him, we can be hopeful. There can be new life, a purer, more spiritual life for our nation; we can experience renewal and resurrection. But first we must tend to our wounds and confess our sins -- each of us and all of us.

With the fear of being presumptuous, I would like to try to reflect with you about my prayer in the last twelve days (now September 22nd).

I have been wanting to spend more time at prayer but when I do, I feel restless. The peace and quiet joy I normally have about being in the presence of God is not there.

For me, in recent days, God has been silent.

People ask for words of comfort and consolation.

What word of comfort do I have to give? I need comfort myself. How can I give what I do not have?

I turn to Jesus' powerful words of comfort: "Come to me all you who labor and find life burdensome and I will refresh you. Take my yoke upon your shoulders and learn from me for I am gentle and humble of heart. Your souls will find rest, for my yoke is easy and my burden light."

"In all this devastation, make our burden lighter, Lord. It's too heavy! Let us be yoked to one another as we are yoked to you, O Lord. May we cry to you, O Lord, individually and collectively --

Jesus, son of David, have mercy on us! Heal us of the violence around us and within us."

