No man is an island *

No man is an island, entire of itself;
every man is a piece of the continent,
a part of the main.

Saturday morning in autumn; a time for standing on the sidelines with coffee cup in hand, watching your kids kick the soccer ball or chasing the quarterback. For so many of us, Saturday morning has become the refuge from the harshness of the rest of the week; a time to immerse ourselves in the joy of our children. This has become our American pastime.

Since September 11, the American pastime is no longer carefree; no longer innocent. We now go to funerals on Saturday morning. Funerals for the young heroes we never knew; yet their lives have been branded on our heart, each opening a new wound that will never fully heal.

Three weeks ago, on Saturday morning, I stood in the boyhood church of Edward Murphy in Clifton. Eddie lost his life in the World Trade Center attack. His brother Dan, my pastor in Sparta, spoke of this extraordinary man who gave so much more than he took. Twelve years earlier, after the murder of my son, Dan held me in his arms and helped me to latch onto something he called "righteous anger." He helped me to survive, and now it is my turn to reach out to him.

Last Saturday morning was spent at St. John's Cathedral in Paterson. It was my second visit to this beautiful church. Five years ago, as I sat alone early in the morning reading the newspaper, I was drawn to an article about a teenager, Cindy Vilalba. The first in her family to attend college, Cindy had just returned from helping the poor in Equador. She was the pride of her family. The night she returned, she was attacked while sitting in her car. Cindy was robbed and murdered. Within a few moments, I found myself on Route 80 heading for this church in

Paterson. Why? Because this young crime victim and her family had instantly become a part of me. And I had to be with them.

My second visit to St. John's last Saturday was equally difficult. In my representation of crime victims throughout the State of New Jersey, I often find myself going toe to toe with the lawyer for the accused. Both of us seeking justice. Both of us advocating from the passion within us, for the rights of the person who had come to us for help.

One of my adversaries in a recent case which took place at the courthouse in Paterson, just up the street from St. John's, was Joseph Afflito. A fine attorney, Joe is respected by defense lawyers, prosecutors and victims' rights advocates throughout the State. He was at St. John's for the memorial service for his son, Daniel. The father of a young son, Danny was so convinced two days before September 11 that his wife Stacy was pregnant; he patted her on the stomach and asked how his daughter Jessica was doing. When Stacy told him that he must have been dreaming because she wasn't pregnant, he reassured her that she was and talked her into taking a pregnancy test on Monday. The test was negative. A few days after Danny was killed at the Twin Towers, Stacey took another test. Their second child is due next spring.

As I sat in church and looked at the Afflito family while a close friend told this story to a thousand of us, I could only feel the wound opening on my heart.

I never knew Eddie, or Cindy or Danny. But they are not alone. They were never alone. They are a part of me. They are a part of all of us.

If a clod be washed away by the sea,
Europe is the less, as well as if a promontory were,
as well as if a manor of they friends or of thine own were.

For those of us who have grown up in the New York metropolitan area, we feel a richness of culture, of family, of kinship with each other. Manhattan is less of an island and more of a birthplace to most of us. The Murphy, Vilalba and Afflito families, like most of us, first became

Americans in the New York harbor, just minutes away from the land where the Twin Towers stood.

My grandfather, Nicholas Pompelio, hid on a ship as a stow away when he left Italy 80 years ago. He worked as a laborer for the Erie Lackawanna Railroad and in 1944, while four of his young sons were off to Europe fighting a World War, he was called out in a snow storm to clean the tracks, and was killed. His sons couldn't home for his funeral. They were fighting to protect the birthright he had given to each of them.

I like to believe that I have a small bit of his courage.

I can no longer look at the Manhattan skyline without a sense of emptiness and loss. But while the physical structures of the Twin Towers are no longer apparent, the spirit of each hero killed by the madness of evil men is there. You can feel it. You can sense it. And the spirit of each of these heroes continues each day to rise from the ashes and remind us that we are all a part of each other.

Any man`s death diminishes me,
because I am involved in mankind.
And therefore never send to know
for whom the bell tolls;
it tolls for thee.

Over 6000 people were murdered on September 11 from the terrorist attacks. This total equals the average number of individuals murdered in the United States about every 100 days. That's right. Each year almost 22,000 people are murdered in this Country. And with each murder, the number of victims created becomes immeasurable. The wounds on the hearts of the parents, grandparents, children, spouses, brothers and sisters, friends, and so on, simply never heal. The killing creates a river of grief that will continue to flow until everyone who knew or knew of that person is no longer alive.

I think of the thousands of murder victims I have tried to help over the past decade. From them I draw strength and courage. In their survivorship, there is inspiration and hope, for all of us. Because they are a part of all of us.

I have never met most of my heroes. They died before I had a chance to meet them. But I know them so well. I know them through the ones they left behind. And I am no less diminished for not having met them personally.

So when I hear the toll of the bell as I leave the churches, I will see the faces of Eddie, Cindy, Danny and the so many thousands of crime victims who have become a part of my being. We are all a part of each other, and harm to one of us is harm to all of us. So remember that when you hear the toll of the bell, it does not only toll for them or for me.

It tolls for thee.

Richard Pompelio
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