

## Reflection for Sunday 22B, 29th August 2021

This weekend, we cannot escape the fact that 20 years ago the world stood and watched as the events of 9/11 unfolded before our eyes as the twin towers collapsed onto the streets of central New York. Radio, television and the Internet are recalling those hours and events which changed the face of the world at the start of this century. Life changed. Nothing felt secure and life was no longer sacred. Stories are told by those of the emergency services who brought out the injured and the dead from the rubble of the twin towers. Ground zero will become, once again, a focus for the world's attention, a place that has been visited by many, including Pope Francis and Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI. The names are too many to be counted but they are still living in the minds and hearts of their families who lost their loved ones in such an untimely and tragic way. Throughout many parts of the world, religious and non-religious people will gather to recall the events of September 2001. There will be prayers, laments, candles, silence and perhaps music or song. It will tell us to remember and not to forget. Twenty years, the world continues to deal with another unforeseen event: The Pandemic and the impact of COVID-19. For our apparently sophisticated world, we never thought that, once again, our lives would be changed forever. As we continue to live in a time of uncertainty and for many, a time of significant and social upheaval, these words from Mona Siddiqui, professor of Islamic and interreligious studies at the University of Edinburgh may offer us some consolation at this poignant time.

“The COVID-19 pandemic has created a new urgency around public health and there is a concerted international effort among scientists to create an effective vaccine. But the loss of so many lives in such a short period of time has also heightened our sense of our own mortality. That we cannot control and plan our lives as before has become a startling reality; that we had grown to thinking long term about our hopes and ambitions but must now take life a day at a time, unsettles and frustrates us. Many, especially those living on their own, express their pain and loneliness as well as fear of greater uncertainty on social media. Vague information and at times, improper communications through media created greater fear and panic. And while the UK along with several other countries, has now begun the gradual easing of lockdown, no one knows for certain what we can return to from our former lives. The economic and psychological impact of both the quarantine and the post-quarantine period will be unknown for years to come. Trust in governments and the scientific communities fluctuates but most people have remained compliant and obeyed government rules and regulations. Life as we know it has changed in many ways and although many of us are struggling in minor ways, we all know someone who feels overwhelmed by all of this. Yet despite these challenging times, people searched for hope in ordinary acts of generosity and kindness. Community and togetherness in separation has become the narrative of the day. For now, most of us are less indifferent to the destiny of others, we are empathetic towards those taking risks every day and we remain grateful. Big companies and corporations are rethinking how to do business which demands less travel and fewer face-to-face meetings and is fairer as well as ecologically just. Crisis management is everywhere. We are also witnessing the beauty of clearer skies, cleaner air and observing the wonder of nature and wildlife a little more closely. Life has become quieter and against this relative stillness, people are being urged to be kinder to themselves as well as to others. Once this struggle has passed, maybe a gentler and kinder future for all could be based on nurturing compassion and gratitude as a way of life. Both 9/11 and the 2008 financial crisis were socially divisive turning points in our lives. Today, however, we share common struggles because of this virus and it may be years before we will be able to measure its true impact on the world. But if the virus has made us aware of our vulnerabilities, it is this shared vulnerability which continues to help us recognize our common humanity.”