

Let God Be Our Light, for Hope & Peace

A Pastoral Reflection on Unity & Compassion

+Fr. George Tsahakis, 9/11/2025

This title speaks to the divine presence we seek in times of sorrow and uncertainty. It reminds us that in the face of tragedy—whether the devastation of 9/11 or the heartbreaking loss of Iryna Zarutskya—God remains our guiding light. His love calls us to hope, His peace urges us to act, and His image in every person beckons us to unity.

Today, we solemnly mark the anniversary of September 11th—a day of unimaginable loss and heroic sacrifice. We remember the thousands who perished, the families forever changed, and the unity that emerged from the ashes. In the face of terror, Americans stood together, transcending divisions to affirm our shared humanity.

We especially honor the emergency responders—firefighters, police officers, paramedics, and countless volunteers—who ran toward danger while others fled. Their courage, selflessness, and unwavering commitment to saving lives became a beacon of hope in our darkest hour. In the days and months that followed, their sacrifices helped us begin the long journey of healing and rebuilding. Their legacy is one of valor and compassion—a legacy we must never forget.

Yet today, we are also confronted with another tragedy—one that pierces the heart and demands our attention. Just weeks ago, Iryna Zarutskya, a 23-year-old Ukrainian refugee who fled the horrors of war, boarded a light rail train in Charlotte seeking peace and safety. Moments later, she was brutally attacked by a man with a long history of violence and mental illness. Surveillance footage shows her

sitting quietly, unaware of the danger behind her. Her attacker rose, pulled out a knife, and struck her fatally in the neck. Passengers screamed and scattered. No one intervened. No one tried to save her.

This image—of a young woman facing her killer alone, surrounded by witnesses frozen in fear or indifference—is a haunting indictment of our moral condition. It compels us to ask: *What has become of our sacred duty to protect the vulnerable? Where is the compassion that once defined our national character?*

As Greek Orthodox Christians, we believe that every human being is created in the image and likeness of God. We are not strangers to one another—we are one nation under God. Our faith calls us to be vigilant in love, courageous in mercy, and unwavering in justice. We must not allow fear or apathy to silence our conscience.

The legacy of this nation—built on liberty and justice for all—is far better than what Iryna experienced. Her death must not be in vain. It must awaken us to the sacred responsibility we bear: *to lift up the downtrodden, to speak for the voiceless, and to ensure that no one seeking refuge in our land is met with violence or neglect.*

Let us honor the memory of those lost on 9/11 and the innocent life of Iryna Zarutka by recommitting ourselves to the Gospel of Christ. Let us teach our children to respect others, to defend the weak, and to build a society where love triumphs over hate.

And let us act—not tomorrow, but today. Reach out to someone in need. Offer a word of kindness, a helping hand, a prayer of support. Let your love share God's light that breaks through someone's

darkness. In doing so, we honor the heroes of our past and become the hope of our future.

May the memory of the 9/11 victims and Iryna be eternal. May the sacrifices of our brave heroes inspire us to live with courage and compassion. And may our communities reflect the Kingdom of God—where peace reigns, justice flows, and every soul is cherished. Amen!

