

Good Morning. I am humbled to stand before you today.

Today, we celebrated Mass in our school uniforms, and we dress our best to show respect to God. Tomorrow St. Gregory is having a red, white, and blue dress down day, for a very special reason. These colors are the colors of our American flag, and they remind us of our country, our freedom, and the people who keep us safe.

As a child growing up in Queens, New York, I watched the Twin Towers rise from my 7th grade classroom window. It was an incredible sight. As I got older, I often visited The World Trade Center: dining at *Windows of the World* staring out of the massive windows...you literally felt as if you were on top of the world...gazing out over the bridges that connected Manhattan to Brooklyn. It was breathtaking.

Twenty-four years ago, on this day, September 11, 2001, something very sad happened in our country. On that day, many innocent people suddenly lost their lives in a terrible attack. But even in that dark moment, there were heroes—firefighters, police officers, and ordinary people—who risked or even gave their lives to help others.

I had the blessing of teaching in Brooklyn, where I taught many amazing young people like yourselves. One of my former students, Anthony, was an extraordinary young man who grew up to become an NYPD sergeant and an Emergency Medical Technician. On September 11, 2001, he was there when the Towers collapsed. Believing he might die, he took shelter under his truck and prayed the Rosary, asking Our Blessed Mother to comfort his wife and mother. God heard his prayers. Anthony survived, returned safely to his family, and later received a medal for his bravery in serving New York. Stories like Anthony's remind us that even in moments of great fear - faith, courage, and prayer can carry us through.

Another hero was firefighter Stephen **Siller**. He had just finished his shift at the firehouse, when he heard about the attack. He wanted to help, but the roads were closed. So, he ran through a tunnel, carrying all of his heavy gear, to reach the people in who needed help. Sadly, he lost his life that day, but his courage and love live on.

His family started the **Tunnel to Towers Foundation** to honor him and all those who gave their lives so that all Americans will never forget the events that unfolded on September 11, 2001. This foundation helps families of fallen first responders and builds homes for wounded veterans, showing love and care just as Jesus calls us to do.

So tomorrow, when you wear red, white, and blue, remember two things:

1. To pray for all those who perished on 9/11 and for their families.
2. To live with kindness, courage, and faith—just like Stephen Siller and the many heroes of that day.

In closing I ask you all to take a moment today, tomorrow, and all the days that follow to pray for peace in our world and for all who serve to keep us safe.

Thank you, and may God bless America.