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The Plague of Terrorism

by

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In his novel *The Plague*, Camus tells the story of a plague which infects a whole city. There is nothing anyone can do to avoid it, nothing to cure it, a situation in which everyone is caught up as a group. The moral of his story is that together we are responsible to do what we can and to courageously face the plague together.

We as Americans are infected with a plague called terrorism. We can't escape it, it is within our country and we are in it together. We are individually responsible to do what we can to face the common danger together. We must courageously do what we can and recognize that we can die from it but we die for a reason and not for the absurdity of death.

Augustine once said there is no evil from which God could not draw good. In the case of the terrorist plague, what is revealed to us is a strong sense of solidarity, that we are in this together for better or for worse. In ordinary times this notion of solidarity and community is mostly forgotten as we go about our individual cares and concerns. But when we are faced with a common danger that threatens us all, the notion of solidarity becomes acute, and consoling as well, since the only thing more frightening than danger is a danger which must be faced alone. This is realized acutely by soldiers in combat who must rely on each other as a matter of life and death. Also in a natural disaster that destroys the whole community as the tsunami in Asia this year. The threat from terrorism that can strike anywhere, any time, haphazardly makes us depend on each other as nothing else could join us together. Never have we felt more American than when we need each other as in this war on terrorism. *E pluribus unum* has never been so real as during this war on terrorism.

We are responsible to each other to face the common plague and not to be afraid to give the ultimate sacrifice for what we believe.

By "afraid" I do not mean that we are not to experience physical fear – certainly we do. I mean a fear that renders us helpless, defeated, unable to reach out to each other. That kind of fear can be controlled and must be overcome when we are witness to the courage and strength of others. Always among us there are true heroes who overcome this fear and give us an example of courage to the rest. The hero is not the one who is not afraid physically – he is; but it is he who does not permit his fear to paralyze himself and who reaches out to be with and help others. There are always such people who rise up among us. He is the one who does not deny that he will die and perhaps will die from the common plague of terrorism which affects us all. But he does not allow that fear to paralyze his life and render him helpless. He accepts his possible fate, his necessary possibility which is death which is inevitable, yet he strives to overcome that fear to be in solidarity with his fellow Americans.

Each has his/her part to play in responsibility: vigilance, protective measures and preparation to die as heroes if necessary. The question is posed to each and every American. *What are we prepared to die for – and why?*

The fact is that this war has no front lines where the battle is waged. The front lines go right down the streets and homes of every city, every village, every home in America. The plague of terrorism no longer has any front lines because that is the nature of terrorism: a blind force which can strike noncombatants anywhere to bring about the death of innocents without warning, in order to break the morale of the American people. That is why it is so crucial for each and every American to be able to answer these questions: Am I ready to die? For what shall I die? What are those values for which I am willing to sacrifice my life and lives of my loved ones? These are the crucial questions thrust upon us (unwillingly) by the terrorist plague. The common danger of death from terrorism makes us both vulnerable and unitary. Where there is great danger there alone is there the possibility of virtue, courage and solidarity. Perhaps whole cities will be destroyed by weapons of mass destruction which the Islamic enemy might possess; perhaps well-placed poison gasses or poison in food or water supplies will kill thousands; perhaps car or personal bombs in a mall or supermarket – no matter the source. If we are prepared to die, we will do so courageously and with the knowledge of a dying for a purpose. We will not be whimpering cowards afraid to walk down the street or conduct our business. We know why we are alive and the values we live for; we are therefore prepared to die for these same values.

We are in a plague. We are responsible to and for each other. We must not be afraid to die for the values we hold dear. And we do it together.

From this point of view, this war on terrorism draws us closer to one another as a community, which we never experienced before. It makes us realize who we are because we are willing to die for these values. We shall have become a true community built not of stones but of human solidarity and dependency. We truly shall have become one – known as the American people. It will perhaps be one of the few times in our lives when we shall have taken life and death seriously. We will not permit our enemy to take what we value most in life because we rebel against him with all our strength and all our very being.

May God give us the grace to do so.
