

14th November 2023

Servant

""Servant of God, well done."

John Milton, *Paradise Lost*

Spending time at the memorials in New York which fill the space where the Twin Towers stood before the 9/11 tragedy, I felt a deep sense of privilege that I could read name after name, etched in the black marble. The memorials have a deep power in their simplicity, for it is the names that matter. Everyone who died that day is worth remembering.

I knew none of the victims of 9/11. Yet one name struck me forcibly, and I stood for a long time by the inscription which read,

Chaplain, Mychal F Judge

It never occurred to be that a Chaplain would be among those who died, and I was profoundly moved as I read his name.

Mychal Fallon Judge, an American Franciscan friar and Catholic priest, was the first certified casualty of the 9/11 attacks. He'd been a chaplain with the New York City Fire Department since 1992, offering encouragement and prayers at fires, rescues and hospitals, often spending long hours with staff and their families. But he was also well known in the city for his ministry to homeless people, the LGBTQ community, recovering alcoholics, people with AIDS, and anyone who felt alienated from society.

He once gave his winter coat to a homeless woman on the street, saying, "She needed it more than I did." One another occasion, when he had anointed a man who was dying of AIDS, the man asked him, "Do you think God hates me?" Fr Judge picked him up, kissed him and rocked him in his arms. In his later years, he was an advocate for gay rights, marching in pride parades and attending other gay events. He was 68 when he died.

One of his colleagues said of him, "His whole ministry was about love." As I read his name on the 9/11 memorial, I paid a silent tribute to a good man whom I never knew, and I'm happy to do so again here.

"Servant of God, well done." Father Mychal Fallon Judge, I thank God for your ministry of love and service. I pray God that I can learn from your life of self-giving and sacrifice. RIP.

A prayer for today

"To give and not to count the cost."

Thank you, God, that there are people who do just that. Amen