Some reflections on the Lectionary Readings for September 11, 2011

By Marisa Brown Ludwig

Romans 14:1-12

Do Not Judge Another

Welcome those who are weak in faith, but not for the purpose of quarrelling over opinions. Some believe in eating anything, while the weak eat only vegetables. Those who eat must not despise those who abstain, and those who abstain must not pass judgement on those who eat; for God has welcomed them. Who are you to pass judgement on servants of another? It is before their own lord that they stand or fall. And they will be upheld, for the Lord is able to make them stand.

Some judge one day to be better than another, while others judge all days to be alike. Let all be fully convinced in their own minds. Those who observe the day, observe it in honour of the Lord. Also those who eat, eat in honour of the Lord, since they give thanks to God; while those who abstain, abstain in honour of the Lord and give thanks to God.

We do not live to ourselves, and we do not die to ourselves. If we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord; so then, whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord’s. For to this end Christ died and lived again, so that he might be Lord of both the dead and the living.

Why do you pass judgement on your brother or sister? Or you, why do you despise your brother or sister? For we will all stand before the judgement seat of God. For it is written,

‘As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall give praise to God.’

So then, each of us will be accountable to God.

It is amazing to consider how Paul’s words could have been written at any time in history, and today can still be so appropriate. This reading is especially that way.

When Christians fear Muslims or Jews, are we not thinking they have weaker faith? That they observe traditions we do not think are necessary? And do they not say the same of us? But here, Paul is saying, do not pass judgment on those who honor God differently, for God welcomes us all, the weak and the strong. (Romans 14:3) Only God knows which one we are.

And besides, when do human beings ever do anything the same way? Even in our nuclear families each child is different. So instead of looking at each other and saying, “I worship God the right way and you don’t,” let us humbly look to our own worship and be sure that in everything we do, we are dedicating our lives to God. Let us respect that others who are worshipping are also doing so with the desire to honor God and be glad that God’s love has room for all of us.
Finally, as we consider how this may be relevant to such a painful anniversary as September 11, 2011 – let us remember humbly that people of every religion have done terrible things in God’s name – there is not one of us that can point to a spotless record. Just because someone does an act of terror and uses his/her religion to justify it doesn’t mean that his/her religion justifies it. What happened in New York City, Washington, D.C. and Pennsylvania ten years ago was done by individual people who committed terrorist acts. Let us stand together, people of every faith tradition, and honor that people died in that tragedy from many faiths; and that families, friends and communities of many faiths have grieved over such loss.

“Why do you pass judgment on your brother or sister? Or you, why do you despise your brother or sister? For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God” (Romans 14:10).

Marisa Brown Ludwig, August 2011