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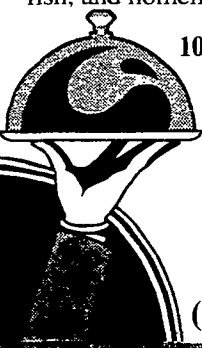
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Pope mourns 'unspeakable horror'

CASTEL GANDOLFO, Italy (CNS) — Pope John Paul II said he was horrified at the "inhuman terrorist attacks" in the United States and offered prayers for the victims and all Americans in "this dark and tragic moment."

The pope, who followed news of the Sept. 11 attacks from his summer residence outside Rome, sent an unusually speedy telegram to President Bush several hours after the attacks began.

"Shocked by the unspeakable horror of today's inhuman terrorist attacks against innocent people in different parts of the United States, I hurry to express to you and your fellow citizens my profound sorrow and my closeness in prayer for the nation at this dark and tragic moment," the papal telegram said.

"Commending the victims to almighty God's eternal mercy, I implore his strength upon all involved in rescue efforts and in caring for the survivors. I beg God to sustain you and the American people in this hour of suffering and trial," he said.

Cardinal Angelo Sodano, Vatican secretary of state, said that as soon as he heard



Reuters/CNS

The second tower of the World Trade Center in New York City falls after the Sept. 11 plane attacks that destroyed both towers.

the news of the attacks, the pope went to pray "to beg from the Lord the end of such fratricidal violence."

In sending his telegram, the pope wanted to express the closeness of the entire church with the American people and its leaders, Cardinal Sodano said.

He said the pope's hope was that "this incredible and desperate act would lead everyone to reflect on the anti-human, anti-Christian nature of violence, of all violence, which leads to nothing."

Cardinal Sodano told Vatican Radio that all Vatican officials were "mourning the dead of this absurd tragedy."

"We ask the Lord to give peace to tormented humanity at the beginning of this

third millennium, which we hope will be a millennium of peace and not hatred," he said.

U.S. priests and seminarians in Rome watched in horror at the unfolding events, and scheduled prayer services for the evening of Sept. 11.

"Obviously the priests here are very saddened and concerned," said Msgr. Steven Raica, superior at the Casa Santa Maria residence for U.S. priests. He said a prayer hour was planned, and a security advisory was posted for students and staff.

At North American College, the U.S. seminary in Rome near the Vatican, Italian police were stationed outside the entrance a few hours after the attacks began.

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