

Saint Anselm College -September 10, 2021 – Remembering Orio Palmer

Good afternoon Abbot Mark, Dr. Favazza, Fr. Jonathan and the entire Monastic & College community. Thank you to Fr. Benet, Patrice, Jim Flanagan and Dr. Gabert for allowing me the honor to participate in this Commemoration. I am truly humbled with being here today. To the family and friends of Renee Olson, Richard Keane, Stephen Roach and Marine Captain Kyle Van De Geisen, I extend my thoughts and prayers as we reflect on their time here at St. A's and the loss suffered on 9/11 and in Afghanistan. So many stories, incredible lives lost, but yet all are remembered with equal reverence for who they are, how they lived and the void we have felt since their passing. But trust me, none of them will be forgotten.

Orio Joseph Palmer. Born March 2, 1956, married my cousin Debbie, April 17, 1983 - Son, brother, husband, father, friend and Battalion 7 Deputy Chief, Engine Company 3, Ladder 12, New York City Fire Department. The Finest. Standing about 6 feet, 175 lbs, dark hair, the obligatory firefighter mustache, raspy Bronx accent and diehard Yankees fan. Right out of central casting. Orio grew up in the Bronx, attended Cardinal Spellman High School and would settle in NY with the love of his life where they raised three beautiful children – Dana, Keith and Alyssa. Orio and Debbie were grounded in their faith and passed this on to their children. Prior to joining the fire department Orio worked as an electrical engineer and repairmen on elevators all over NYC. Experience that would prove invaluable during his time with the department.

Orio had a reputation as one of the most knowledgeable members of the entire department. He was nationally published and performed extensive trainings on radio communications, high-rise fires and the approaches for stairwells during fire calls. Orio was a true student of his craft. An insatiable thirst to learn, understand and share. His dedication to the department was exactly what you would expect for

someone with a calling. So much so, I remember when Orio would run half marathons for the department just to earn a t-shirt from the FDNY and to say, I finished it. Fitness was always a focus for Orio training, training, training. So instrumental in handling the rigors of being on the FDNY. Saint Benedict once said, "Idleness is the enemy of the soul" and I can assure you, Orio's soul is just fine and flourishing!

The last time I saw Orio was at my bachelor party in April of 2001 down on Cape Cod. A little golf, cousins, friends, a few Budweiser's and of course some incredible Yankees / Red Sox debates. I remember being at the Irish Village in Yarmouth and having the most intense debate over Yankees v. Sox. So much fun. He was one of the guys and we loved him for it.

He was a family man. Always a giver and wanting to help out, always thinking of others and never taking himself too seriously. To his children as well as the kids in the neighborhood he was simply known as the Music Man. Always had tunes on in the kitchen, dancing away as he prepared breakfast and embracing the motto, which was on his refrigerator - "Live while you are alive".

September 11, 2001 I was sitting at my desk in Boston when news broke of the attack on the North Tower. I remember going in to the conference room, turning on the TV and like many of us, just watching in disbelief. And then the unthinkable, watching as the South Tower was hit. I immediately called my mother who was working a few blocks away and I could hear the shock in her voice. I then called my wife Jenn who was working down the street and we made the decision to grab mom and drive home. There was a mass exodus out of the city and it was a quiet ride home as we listened to the coverage and wondered if our family members were safe or not. Later that day we found out that Uncle Ed and Cousin Charlie McSherry were both safe, Orio was unaccounted for. A couple days passed

before we came to grips with the fact that Orio was gone forever. Along with nearly 3000 others in NYC, Washington DC and Shanksville, PA,. The realization was hard, really really hard.

So much sadness, so many emotions and months and months of unknowns. What happened, where he was, was he scared and so many other questions. Attending the memorial service, gathering in prayer and celebrating a life lost too soon was beyond overwhelming. My cousins, aunt and uncle, Debbie, the children and of course Orio's surviving brothers from FDNY.

A few years later the audio tapes were released of the firefighter radio recordings, and what was detailed was both improbable and moving. In the documentary, "9/11 Phone Calls from the Towers" there is a portrayal of what Orio experienced that day. We could see him, we could hear him. Orio was one of the First Responders to the North Tower. When the South Tower was impacted, the decision was made to enter the South Tower and fight that fire. It is documented that he single handedly repaired an elevator in the South Tower. He took the elevator to the 40<sup>th</sup> floor. Additionally, there were significant radio malfunctions and challenges which were fixed by Orio.

When he arrived on the 40<sup>th</sup> floor, he radioed down to control. He started to climb on foot, 50+lbs of gear. Think of that, 6 gallons of milk in weight climbing and radioing the entire time. During his ascent he discovered one stairwell was intact and an escape route for those trapped. Orio maintained his composure, calling out commands, providing details at the impact zone. Yes, Orio Joseph Palmer made it to the 78<sup>th</sup> floor on the South Tower, the Impact Zone. Not a surprise to those who knew him, but nonetheless, nothing short of true heroism. 7 minutes after Orio's last communication, the South Tower collapsed. Orio Joseph Palmer, doing what he loved, his calling to the very end. I think if that moment and the faith Orio had and am comforted knowing that God was right there with him, on the 78<sup>th</sup> floor of the South Tower.

Quite a bit has happened in 20 years. Dana, Keith and Alyssa are grown, married and Orio is a grandfather. Debbie never lost faith, stayed strong and was an inspiration to all of us every day. We were all saddened earlier this year when Debbie succumbed to an advanced form of leukemia and now is resting at peace in Heaven with the Music Man.

In speaking with Keith earlier this week I was reminded what incredible parents and people of Faith Orio and Debbie were as we discussed family, faith, growth, adversity, vulnerability and being true to one's core. Why and how things happen for a reason, and the plan, at times may be challenging, is out of our hands. That faith, family, relationships and experiences are what life is all about. As we discussed the Legacy of Orio and all those lost that day. And he finished up by wishing me luck up at St. A's on Friday ... I was reminded me "Live while we are alive..."

God Bless America