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My birthday is...

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My birthday is Sept. 11. So is my nephew's birthday, several friends, and a growing number of acquaintances. As the day draws nearer, we discover one another. We have a unique bond. We're the folks whose special day is marked in infamy.

How do you celebrate a day defined by tragedy? It feels almost sacrilege to receive a present. Having a party is out. The entire day is shrouded in remembrance.

It's awkward for others as well. My mother gave me a gift in June! Others' reaction is usually a stunned, "You're kidding!" or silent sympathy.

So what about those of us who owned 9/11 before 2001? How do we handle it now? I'd been largely ignoring the issue until yet another stranger mentioned 9/11 as his birthday. Some comforting was definitely in order.

I thought of Jesus' beatitude, "Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted" (Matt. 5:4). The key for me, actually, is the word *blessed*. The Greek word is *makarios*. There's a beautiful discussion of it in the "Key Study Bible": "*Makarios* differs from happy because happy is the person who has good luck (from the root *hap*, favorable circumstances). A blessed person is one whom God makes fully satisfied, not because of favorable circumstances, but because He indwells the believer through Christ. To be *makarios*, blessed, is equivalent to having God's kingdom within one's heart.... *Makarios* is the one who is in the world yet independent of the world; his satisfaction comes from God and not from favorable circumstances."

Sept. 11 is my birthday and I can feel blessed. Not because of favorable circumstances. I still have to fight off mental images associated with 9/11. I am blessed despite the worldly circumstances. I am blessed because of my

relationship with God. This relationship transcends dates and can't be defeated by them.

God is the creator of the universe and every living creature in it. God's creation isn't defined by days or years. It has a timeless, immortal quality. In the eternal scheme of things, my creation and relationship with God didn't begin Sept. 11 or even when my parents conceived me. I have always existed as a beloved idea of the heavenly Father-Mother. My appearance a few years ago on Sept. 11 no more began my eternal existence than my disappearance some years from now will end it. No human event can destroy the joy of my eternal life.

Instead of birthday, I'm thinking timeless continuity with God. So while I may not feel happy on Sept. 11, I can feel blessed. I can celebrate my life and others' ongoing life and our permanent relation to the Divine. This comforts those that mourn. It comforts me.

But what about those who aren't believers in Christ? Are they separated from feeling *makarios* and being blessed? That's a much debated theological question. But my view is that Christ is the spiritual idea of God the divine incarnate in Jesus.

The Christ-spirit can come to a person and guide them even before they know or accept that Jesus expressed Christ on earth. Christ was incarnate in Jesus but was present on earth before and after Jesus. So, for example, Nebuchadnezzar, a heathen Babylonian king living 600 years before Christ, saw "the Son of God" (see Dan. 3:25). He never met Jesus, but he encountered the Christ.

He was transformed. Isn't this true of many characters in the Old Testament? They experienced transformation, salvation, and even ascension (Enoch, Elijah), before Jesus' birth. So Christ is capable of transforming people today who don't yet know or accept Jesus. The significance of this is that I can witness the spirit of Christ at work in the world among Muslims, Jews, and others. While doctrine may divide us, the Christ-spirit can and will reach and unite receptive hearts everywhere.

On Sept. 11, I will pray for those who lost loved ones. I will pray for our country and the safety of its citizens. I will pray for the world and for the love of God to enter every heart. But as I do, I will not feel guilty. I won't feel guilty because I was born on a day others died. I will feel comforted.

Comforted by God and the knowledge of eternal life. Comforted because we all are blessed. Blessed not because someone's special, but because we are all included in the embrace of God.