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For Immediate Release

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Osama Bin Laden's Death Prompts Franciscans to Encourage Reflection

NEW YORK — May 4, 2011 — The leaders of Holy Name Province, the largest United States religious community of men following St. Francis of Assisi, have voiced their perspective after the announcement on May 1 of the death of Osama bin Laden.

The Rev. John O'Connor, OFM, provincial minister of the 110-year old organization based in Midtown Manhattan, and provincial vicar the Rev. Dominic Monti, OFM, distributed this statement to members of the province today, encouraging them to share the information with their parishes and ministries.

The electrifying news earlier this week that Osama bin Laden has been killed has gripped the attention of our nation and the world, occasioning powerful and conflicting emotions and reactions. It invites us, as Franciscans, to stand back and reflect prayerfully on what God might be inviting us to in the wake of this death.

Like so many, perhaps our first response, on a very human level, was a sense of relief. The sinister attacks of Sept. 11, 2001, are still deeply embedded in our national and personal consciousness. These images surface not only anger but also fear and unease at the precarious nature of life. On Sept. 11, we lost one of our own brothers, Fr. Mychal Judge, OFM; many people we serve also suffered the death of relatives and friends in the attacks. Since 2001, we have felt the emptiness of the loss of loved ones, as well as the darkness of fear that 9/11 opened in all of our lives: Will we be attacked again?

Osama bin Laden, in many ways, became the embodiment of our fears. The announcement of his death, then, may have produced an understandable dimension of cathartic release — a sense, or at least hope, that things may be better. Such a release may initially express itself in joy. But if we are honest with ourselves as Christians, we quickly feel quite uncomfortable with a joy that comes from the death of another human being — even one we call our enemy. Isn't this discomfort the sting of conscience reminding us that as Gospel people, as Easter people in this season of hope, we are called by God to something more?

We are reminded in the Word of God: *“Do not rejoice when your enemy falls, and do not let your heart be glad when he stumbles; or the LORD will see it and be displeased.”* (Proverbs 24:17-18a)

So, if we are not to rejoice at this event, what is the invitation of God?

In this Easter season, we are reminded that all good things we hope for, even overcoming death itself, are possible through the love and mercy of God. The risen Christ's words to his followers, "*Peace be with you,*" invite us to remember that, as evil as the actions of Osama bin Laden were, he was still a beloved child of God. Yes! While God would never condone the hateful actions of bin Laden, never was God's love withdrawn from him. This sobering truth of the Gospel is a call to us to reinvigorate our efforts to resolve conflict at all levels of our own lives: personal, political and social.

The killing of Osama bin Laden means that there is no opportunity, at least in this life and in his case, for reconciliation with an "enemy." However, we are left to contemplate those people in our lives, at all levels, with whom working toward reconciliation is still a possibility.

Reflecting on this decisive moment in our country should move us to prayer. We pray for Osama bin Laden, his family and those who follow his leadership: that they may not harden their hearts at his killing and seek revenge. We pray, too, for ourselves: that we might not rest in joy or harden our own hearts at his death.

Second, we are called to redouble our efforts to seek peaceful solutions to international and domestic conflicts, enjoining our leaders to seek lasting peace in Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, Israel-Palestine, Sudan, Congo and other locations torn by warfare. As Franciscans, we are particularly aware that reconciliation can repair the broken relationships of humanity — as such, it must be one of our highest goals.

Finally, in our own lives, we are called to do all that is within our ability to reconcile with others with whom we have conflict or disagreement. Perhaps this is also an invitation for greater interfaith dialogue. We must not allow any opportunity to seek reconciliation to pass by unanswered.

Easter reminds us that reconciliation is always possible because of the steadfast love of our God who remains forever committed to us. We pray that we may never lose hope and that we may have the faith and openness to seek to journey with all others of good will.

We offer these reflections with humility, believing that as we respond to the invitation to imitate the love of God revealed in the dying and rising of Jesus Christ, more wondrous and unimaginable gifts await us all.

About Holy Name Province

Holy Name Province is one of seven provinces in the United States that belong to the Order of Friars Minor. It is the largest U.S. province, with ministries in 12 states along the East Coast. Its nearly 350 Catholic priests and brothers serve in colleges, parishes, urban ministry centers and a wide variety of social ministries, as well as in missions in Africa, Asia and South America.

The Order was founded in 1209 by St. Francis of Assisi, who, today, remains one of the most widely known saints, revered for his dedication to peace and care for creation.

Information about Holy Name Province can be found on www.hnp.org.

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