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At an interfaith prayer service Jan. 6, 2025, at St. Louis Cathedral in New Orleans, President Joe Biden, with first lady Jill Biden, places a candle in a semicircle atop a table set up in front of the altar in memory of the 14 people killed during New Year's celebrations in the city's famed French Quarter early Jan. 1. (OSV News/Peter Finney Jr., Clarion Herald)



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New Orleans — January 8, 2025

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Saying he carried with him the sorrow of the nation for a "horrific act of terrorism" on New Year's Day that claimed the lives of 14 people on Bourbon Street, President Joe Biden told grieving families at an interfaith prayer service Jan. 6 at St. Louis Cathedral that they would one day be released from their shared pain.

"I know events like this are hard," Biden said, concluding an hourlong prayer service with New Orleans Archbishop Gregory M. Aymond and more than a dozen of the city's faith leaders. "The shock and pain is still so very raw. My wife Jill and I are here to stand with you, to grieve with you, to pray with you, to let you know you are not alone.

"I know it's been five days of staring at that empty chair at the kitchen table, not hearing their voice. To the families left behind, we know from some experience it's hard, but I promise you, the day will come when the memory of the loved one will bring a smile to your lips before a tear in your eye. It will take time, but I promise you — I promise you — it will come. My prayer is that that day will come sooner rather than later, but it will come. And when it does, you may find purpose in your pain to live the life worthy of the one you lost."

During the prayer service, 14 people processed up the main aisle of the cathedral with a lit candle as the names of the people killed in the terrorist truck assault were read by Father Ajani Gibson, pastor of St. Peter Claver Church in New Orleans. They placed the candles in a semicircle atop a table that stood in front of the altar. Biden then rose from the front pew, picked up another lit candle and placed it in the

middle of the table.

In his 10-minute reflection, Biden recalled a hymn based on Psalm 91: "May he raise you up on eagle’s wings, and bear you on the breath of dawn, make you to shine like the sun and hold you in the palm of his hand."

"If there's one thing we know — New Orleans defines strength and resilience," Biden added. "You define it. Whether it's in the form of this attack or hurricanes or superstorms — this city is people who get back up."

Police said 14 people died and more than three dozen were injured, many seriously, when a white Ford F-150 Lightning electric truck, rented by 42-year-old Shamsud-Din Jabbar of Texas, plowed into the crowd walking along the French Quarter's most famous partying street at 3:15 a.m. on Jan. 1.

At nighttime, Bourbon Street becomes a pedestrian thoroughfare that is designed to protect visitors from vehicular traffic through the installation of removable steel bollards at key intersections.

Those bollards were not in place, however, and Jabbar was able to race his truck through the crowd. Nearly three blocks after his rampage began, Jabbar ran into construction equipment, stopping his forward progress. He opened fire on police, wounding two, before he was shot to death by officers, authorities said.

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The FBI said it was investigating the crime as a terror attack — Jabbar had an ISIS flag in his truck — and was investigating possible associations with terrorist groups.

Speaking from St. Louis Cathedral in the 600 block of Chartres Street — five blocks from the end of the rampage — Aymond said the dawn of a new year always brings with it uncertainty because no one has been able "to create a future 'app’ to tell us exactly what will happen from day to day in our lives."

"No one could have predicted the terrorist attack on Bourbon Street at 3:15 in the

morning on New Year's Day," Aymond said. "We never expect such a tragedy to happen at home, but we never know when evil will raise its ugly head and take the lives of 14 people and injure more than 30.

"As we gather tonight, we remember the words of Jesus: 'Come to me all you who are weary and find life burdensome; take my yoke upon your shoulders and you will find rest in me.' What is this yoke that Jesus is talking about? In the time of Jesus, the yoke was a piece of wood used to link two animals together, and together, they would share the load so no one of them had all the work to do and all the pain to bear."

The archbishop said the truck assault was not just a "wound to New Orleans" but also "to our nation, to our world and to our search for freedom."

"In the last week, we have experienced very dark times in our city," he said. "We want God to be a stream of light into our darkness. We hope for that. We believe in that. We know in faith and in hope that that will happen.

"Our prayer tonight is for those who have lost their lives, that they will share in the fullness of God's life in eternal life, and for those who have been injured, that they will be healed in body as well as in spirit."

Aymond said God weeps at the violence in the world today.

"This attack reminds us that we are called to show peace in new ways, that we cannot remain on this road to destruction," he said. "There is something we can be very certain of. When tragedy happens, as it did in our city, we have a God who gives healing to our doubts and to our brokenness. And what are we to do? We are called to let that God touch our pain and give us hope and healing, and we do that tonight."

Also attending the prayer service were Louisiana Gov. Jeff Landry and New Orleans Mayor LaToya Cantrell.

On Jan. 3, Aymond, retired New Orleans Archbishop Alfred C. Hughes and Gibson, visited University Medical Center New Orleans to provide the staff with words of encouragement, pray with them and bless their hands.

"Our hearts go out to the families who have lost loved ones and to the families who have someone still in the hospital," Aymond said. "Our hearts also go out to the medical staff for all that they have done. They have been really heroic, and we want to support them and thank them during this time."

The archbishop visited four floors to bless medical staff and patients.