



## **Father Mychal Judge OFM**

*By Br. Robert Lentz OFM*

As Muslim extremists flew hijacked commercial airplanes into the towers of the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001, they screamed, “God is Great!” to complete their act of self-chosen “martyrdom”. Thousands of innocent people were killed, of many nationalities and different walks of life. The first official casualty was an elderly Franciscan priest who had just administered the last rites to a fireman who had been struck by the body of a woman who had jumped from the towers. His name was Mychal Judge and he was chaplain of the fire department.

The Koran begins with the words, “In the name of God most beneficent, most merciful.” Most world religions proclaim God’s mercy and compassion. The word martyr comes from the Greek word for witness. Mychal Judge was a true martyr who died bearing witness to God’s mercy and beneficence, after a long life spent in the same way.

Fr. Mychal Judge wore his Franciscan habit almost everywhere and rejoiced in his vow of poverty. The holy foolishness of the first Franciscans weaves in and out of the story of his life. As a priest he often sought out and confronted people who had been rebuffed by the harshness of other priests. His chief ministries were to the firemen of New York City, to recovering alcoholics in AA, to people suffering from AIDS, and to Franciscans preparing to make their solemn vows.

The word “martyr” has been twisted out of shape in the 21st century as religious extremists throughout the world try to impose their version of God’s will. This joyful Franciscan friar from New York can remind us of the stuff of which martyrs are really made and challenge us to witness to God’s compassion, however mad our world may seem.