

'You are not alone': Nation mourns with Littleton

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LITTLETON, Colorado (CNN) -- The nation mourned the loss of 12 Columbine High School students and a teacher Sunday as more than 70,000 people gathered in Littleton for a memorial.

Underneath gray skies and in the shadow of snow-covered mountains, Vice President Al Gore shared the grief of millions.

"You are not alone. The heart of America aches with you. We hold your agony in the center of our prayers," said Gore, who with retired Gen. Colin Powell led an array of dignitaries who attended the packed afternoon ceremony in a shopping mall parking lot.

"The entire nation is a community of shock and love and grief. May you feel the embrace of literally hundreds of millions that weep with you," Gore added.

In words, songs, prayers and embraces, the thousands of people at the memorial service -- more than twice as many as were expected -- tried to come to terms with the killings.

In the audience, parents held their children close in a sea of umbrellas, flowers and blue and white balloons -- the colors of Columbine High.

Florists in Colorado and California donated 25,000 bouquets of white and orange lilies, yellow sunflowers and daisies, pink carnations and roses of all hues.

High school-age students held flowers high like banners, as speakers called on them to live their lives better to honor the slain.

Gore also urged the crowd to take something from the tragedy.

"All of us must change our lives to honor these children," Gore told the overflow crowd a few blocks from where two teen-agers went on a rampage and then killed themselves Tuesday. "More than ever, I realize every one of us is responsible for all of the children.

"No society can be perfect, but we know the way things should be," Gore said, his voice thundering like a preacher's.

Singers, speakers honor victims

Mourners of all ages began arriving four hours before the service. For some, it was the second or third vigil they had attended since Tuesday's rampage. Many were Columbine alumni. One student painted a heart over his entire face in Columbine blue.

A quartet of U.S. Air Force F-16s, their leader a Columbine High graduate, flew overhead in a tight pattern known as the missing man formation, as the Rev. Franklin Graham, son of evangelist Bill Graham, recalled the Old Testament story of Job, an upright man loved by God who nonetheless experienced incomparable sufferings for reasons beyond his control.

"You say, 'Why does it go this way?' Somewhere down the road there will be answers to the questions," sang Christian pop star Amy Grant.

Thirteen white doves were released as Colorado Gov. Bill Owens read the names of the victims.

"I see through the grief and tears and outpouring of love. Confronted with an unimaginable evil ... this community has found within itself a tremendous power of healing," he said.

Students of Columbine High, where two classmates killed 12 in a bloody rampage before turning their guns on themselves in suicide, also took to the podium.

One young girl spoke of "the success of our clubs, ... the school's athletic accomplishments, (and) the ladies who make us smile when we receive our lunches."

Student Amber Burgess broke into the school call and response cheer, the audience responding in full.

The memory of Coach David Sanders, one of the slain, would motivate her to do as well as she could in life, said the freckle-faced senior.

"Both students and faculty showed more courage and than I can imagine," she said.

'Peace will come to you in time'

Columbine students Jonathan and Stephen Cohen opened the service with a song they wrote in tribute to the victims.

"Columbine, friend of mine. Peace will come to you in time," they sang in harmony as they strummed guitars.

The two brothers, who were trapped in the school during the attack, said proceeds from the sale of a CD will go to the victims' families.

After the ceremony, mourners began a slow procession to the high school, where a makeshift memorial serves as a focal point of Littleton's grief. They added mementos to the countless flowers, stuffed animals and hand-written signs that cover a fence on the school grounds.

Deputies suspended their investigation and media briefings for the day, concentrating instead on directing traffic for the service.

Later Sunday, the families of victims Daniel Mauser and Kelly Fleming held a joint funeral for their children at a local Catholic church.