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WASHINGTON — President Bush, fresh from his fourth visit to the Gulf Coast, told an audience at the National Cathedral on Friday that he would use the rebuilding process to correct the poverty born of racial discrimination that left so many of Hurricane Katrina’s victims vulnerable.



“The greatest hardship fell upon citizens already facing lives of struggle: the elderly, the vulnerable and the poor,” he said. “And this poverty has roots in generations of segregation and discrimination that closed many doors of opportunity. As we clear away the debris of a hurricane, let us also clear away the legacy of inequality.”

Bush had declared Friday a National Day of Prayer and Remembrance for the victims of Katrina, and churches throughout the country rang bells at noon. There was a series of events in the Los Angeles area. But coming one day after his nationally televised address, in which he pledged that the federal government would “do what it takes” and would “stay as long as it takes to help citizens rebuild their communities and their lives,” the day of remembrance also was part of the president’s effort to reclaim the public confidence in his leadership that was shaken by the sight of thousands of Americans stranded for days without the essentials of life.

The last time Bush declared a national day of prayer was four years ago, after the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11. Then, after an emotional speech at the National Cathedral, he visited ground zero in New York, taking a bullhorn to tell workers, “I can hear you, the rest of the world hears you, and the people who knocked these buildings down will hear all of us soon.” Bush did not use a bullhorn Friday, but he did set a benchmark for his administration on social issues. Praising the outpouring of charity to help victims of Katrina with food, shelter and comfort, Bush made no mention, as he had in recent days, of FEMA’s failures to respond adequately. Instead, he asked for God’s love to “touch all those in need,” and he spoke of the opportunity offered by the storm to change not only lives but attitudes.

“As we rebuild homes and businesses, we will renew our promise as a land of equality and decency,” he said. “And one day, Americans will look back at the response to Hurricane Katrina and say that our country grew not only in prosperity but in character and in justice,” he said.

In the audience were First Lady Laura Bush; Vice President Dick Cheney and his wife, Lynne; Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice; Defense Secretary Donald H. Rumsfeld; Atty. Gen. Alberto R.

Gonzales; and members of the Supreme Court and Congress. Also on hand were first-responders, members of the Salvation Army and several dozen survivors of the hurricane, who sat in the front rows.

"I was trapped in my home for eight days," said Jerome "Popa Gee" Johnson, founder of the New Orleans Music Hall of Fame, which he hopes will be restored. "We actually have the property where Louis Armstrong started and jazz and blues was created, so we want to make sure that this is kept intact and the people of New Orleans maintain their culture and their history," he said.

Bishop T.D. Jakes of the Potter's House ministries in Dallas also urged the power-packed audience to use the devastation of Katrina to ease poverty and discrimination. Noting the destruction of the Twin Span Bridge between New Orleans and Slidell, Jakes said, "While building bridges and cities, let's build unity." He added, "It is not so important what we say. It is important what we do. It costs money to help people. And sometimes we have to love them enough to pay the bill."

House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi (D-San Francisco), who in the early days of the crisis had called for FEMA director Michael Brown's resignation, issued a statement of prayer Friday. "The waters and winds of destruction came down on our fellow citizens on the Gulf Coast," she said. "Now it is our divine charge to bring down the waters of justice; justice in providing for, supporting, rebuilding and serving those who suffer."

Democratic National Committee Chairman Howard Dean also issued a statement: "We pray that this tragedy will raise our collective consciousness of poverty and social justice and renew our commitment to displaced and suffering communities in America."

In Hollywood, a group of parishioners gathered at Hollywood United Methodist Church, with its stained-glass window showing a dove with an olive branch, the biblical sign to Noah that the waters of the great flood had finally receded.

The Rev. Ed Hansen urged prayer for those touched by the disaster: the dead and their loved ones; those who had lost homes and possessions, especially photographs; and those who had lost businesses and beloved pets. He asked that the congregation pray, not just for the nation's leaders, but also for the rescuers, for those who had donated money for the displaced and even for reporters who had expressed their outrage at the slow response.

After the service, actor-singer Mark Stephenson of Valley Village said he was friendly with two New Orleans families, devastated in the disaster that had lost three homes and a family restaurant almost 30 years old. "It's a reminder to all of us that in a second everything you have can literally disappear," Stephenson said.

Another congregant, 44-year-old salesman Jay Sowell, who lives in midtown Los Angeles, said he hoped the tragedy would cause people to stop wrangling over issues such as abortion and prayer in the schools and concentrate their energy on their obligation as people of faith — taking care of each other, especially the needy.

"This tragedy is both an indictment and an opportunity," he said. "It makes very, very clear in a very public way how we're treating millions of people in our country."

Tod Tamberg, spokesman for the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Los Angeles, said he expected celebrants at Friday Masses at the Cathedral of Our Lady of the Angels to say special prayers for the victims and survivors of Hurricane Katrina. As of Friday, more than \$1 million had flowed into the archdiocesan fund for hurricane relief: "To pass the \$1-million mark this quickly is rather amazing," he said.

In Camden, N.J., the Rev. Michael Mannion of the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception talked

of how Katrina had reminded Americans that people are more important than possessions. "They learned what's important, they learned who's important, they learned that it's each other who are important," he said.

In Montgomery, Ala., Energy Secretary Samuel Bodman and Alabama Gov. Bob Riley participated in a nondenominational service at Frazier Memorial United Methodist Church. Homeland Security Secretary Michael Chertoff, in the region to oversee relief efforts, joined a ceremony at City Hall in Harrison County, Miss.

Some churches did not participate. "Not to be critical, but the president is a little late," said the Rev. Reginald Jackson, executive director of the Black Ministers' Council of New Jersey, explaining that most churches in his area had already conducted services for Katrina victims. And in Ohio, no one attended an hour long prayer meeting at the statehouse in Columbus, according to the Associated Press, which reported that ministers and a few organizers prayed on their own before 180 empty chairs.

But many who attended the service at the National Cathedral were moved by Bush's remarks. "This was the most amazing experience I've ever been part of," said Capt. Donna Igleheart of the Salvation Army's Washington office. "For them to have on the first three rows survivors was just incredible to me."

As for Bush, Igleheart noted that he stopped to talk to the evacuees. "He shook as many hands as he could and looked them in the eye, and that was very moving to me," she said.