

Dear Friends,

A couple of months ago I caught a bug on a Sunday morning that made presiding at Mass very difficult. I was, however, deeply moved by the compassion and understanding of this community. A lot of people prayed for me. There were many "Get Well" wishes from parishioners. There were even quite a few people who thanked me for celebrating Mass despite the fact that I looked so wretched. People felt bad for me. I sensed the compassion in a powerful way, and will always be grateful for it.

Right now there is great concern about the H1N1 virus. So far, two people in the United States have died from this virus. Nineteen people have died in Mexico where the virus originated. I feel empathy for everyone who has been afflicted by this virus, but I am also very happy to hear that, at this point, the symptoms they have experienced have not been serious.

As I have watched the news, however, I have noticed more alarm and fear in the media coverage than concern. The government's handling of this crisis has been duly scrutinized and so far, positive remarks have been made because the response has been so intense. But not much has been said about those who have actually caught the virus. A few people have been hospitalized, but most of the virus victims have stayed home and rested while most other people have been washing their hands countless times a day. By the way, I had to go to four or five stores before a single container of Purell was found. We have been more vigilant about this strain of the flu than just about anything else I've seen in many years. This flu virus has almost made us forget about how bad the economy is.

Why do we not notice such a national, even global outcry about the thirty-two children who have been shot to death in the City of Chicago since the beginning of this current school year? This flu has its origin in something over which we have very little control and it has almost paralyzed the planet despite the fact that even the most intelligent medical information is saying it is not as serious a problem as was originally feared? Meanwhile thirty two families in Chicago grieve the loss of children whose bright smiles and bright futures were snuffed out by something

that can be controlled: violence and hate. Unfortunately, the greater panic arises when there is talk of gun control, so I won't go there.

Do we feel compassion for the victims of violence? Do we feel the sadness and oppression of hate that afflicts our country today? Our nation is sick. We have been afflicted with a dis-ease brought about by a profound disregard for the dignity of human life. We are living in a very dark time right now; it is a time of confusion, anger and sadness. Our culture seems to be experiencing an uncontrolled spiral into a chronic illness that only love and compassion can cure.

I have seen how loving and compassionate we can be. You shared it with me a few weeks ago when I was sick. I would like to suggest that we need to show that same kind of generous concern for our nation. We face so many incredibly large problems right now and there are many reasons for us to be filled with panic and fear.

That weekend when I was sick I was afraid that people would be angry with me. I thought they would be disappointed in me. That fear turned into a peaceful recovery because you all expressed such kindness to me. I can't help but think that in the collective malaise of our culture; whether it's the H1N1 virus, the murder of children, soldiers in Iraq and Afghanistan, the economy, the disregard for the sanctity and dignity of human life from conception until natural death, etc; we must strive to show even more compassionate concern, more empathy, more generous charity so our culture will begin to experience a more peaceful recovery, too.

In joyful hope,

Fr. Tim Seigel