

February 4, 2011

“Echoes of the Heart”

Reflections on Life and Community Living

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When violence strikes. Dateline: January 8, Tucson, Arizona. A demented shooter goes on a blazing rampage at a *Congress on Your Corner* event at a local supermarket. Six dead, thirteen wounded, one of whom is Gabrielle Giffords, the Democratic congresswoman who hosted the event.

Dateline: January 20, Miami, Florida. At his mother’s apartment, a career criminal ambushes two police officers, part of a *fugitive arrest* team, who were attempting to serve him a warrant for murder.

Dateline: January 24, St. Petersburg, Florida. Two more police officers—again, part of a *fugitive arrest* team—are killed while trying to serve a warrant to an armed fugitive holed up in a house attic.

Everyday, it seems, news reports across the country cite tragic accounts of violence, violence and more violence. It is utterly numbing; and it is never something we get used to. In the wake, our hearts go out to the bereaved families whose lives—sadly and tragically—will never be the same.

What do we do? Where do we turn? When will the madness stop?

The causes of violence are multi-layered, of course. For starters, however, the combination of demented, tortured, angry men (it’s always men) and guns spells a recipe for disaster. As case after case of violent shootings mount up, our liberal gun laws simply must be revisited. However, if we can believe what our newspapers report, our Florida state legislature is seriously considering making gun laws even less restrictive.

The issue here is not about the constitutional right to bear arms. It is about limiting the amount of weapons, in general (through more strict registration laws), and the availability of more violent weapons, in particular.

The argument always put forth in the national debate over guns is that guns don’t kill people, people do. The truth is: people *with* guns kill people. As statistics on crime suggest, seldom do guns prevent crime and almost never do they make us safer.

The variable in the debate is not people. There will always be some percentage of human beings harboring evil, potentially violent impulses. This is a constant; it is the human situation. The variable (what can be controlled) is the too-easy availability of guns. It has gotten to the point where the escalating availability of more violent weapons (with excessive capacity to kill) has become mindless in our culture.

The tragic loss of human life in the trail of these violent acts brings us to our knees in sadness and sorrow. In a moment of madness, lives are snuffed out. Looking back at the senseless death, we're reminded how life is so fleeting. Literally, we are here one moment and gone the next.

Violence and God's will. People often ask, *where is God is all of this?* A good question! However, acts of violence are never God's will. They are the consequences of sinful acts, of people with troubled spirits, making horrific choices.

But then, *Why doesn't God stop the violence?* From what we can discern, God doesn't work like that. God has created us in freedom. In the exercise of our freedom, God works through us and the choices we make. Our challenge is to create a society where the probability of people making sound decisions, decisions that promote the public good, is increased, not shattered in senseless acts of rage.

In the sacred writings of all religions, God wills that we become peacemakers and that we rise to the high calling of the *golden rule*: *to do unto others as we would want them to do unto us*. This is a universal teaching of all religions.

While God does not *will* evil, God does what God can to use the evil that we do for good, much as God used the cross of Christ—which was never God's idea—as a prelude to the joy of Easter morning.

What God does, indeed, will is the love that we do and the good that we seek—everyday—in realizing God's purposes through acts of compassion, kindness, tolerance, forgiveness and generosity of spirit.