

Coping can take many forms

The faithful people of St. Agnes in Avon did much to settle my spirit and bring peace to my heart yesterday. I joined them at Downs Park in their lovely town for the Sunday Eucharistic Liturgy followed by a parish picnic.

I would have respected whatever decision they made about the picnic, but I confess to being delighted to participate in this event, which had been several months in the planning. I felt that it was appropriate to gather in prayer and, equally so, to extend the celebration to include the customary joyful events of a picnic outing.

Parishioners had prepared food; a clown brought delight to children; adults enjoyed a silent auction, music and the chance to browse through a collection of photographs covering many years of parish life.

The parish community, led by Pastoral Administrator Barbara Swiecki, prepared a liturgy that was sensitive to the situation, involved children and adults in ministry, and genuinely invited the participation of all.

During the picnic time after the liturgy, I had a chance to chat with quite a number of people. We talked about many things. Always there was an awareness — sometimes spoken, sometimes tacit — that we were all trying to settle from the shock of last week, support one another and move constructively into the future.

I thank the people of St. Agnes for their faith and hopeful spirit. I left their company much more settled inside than I was when I joined them. The great generosity and kindness of people I met all through the week had, in God's providence, started the healing process in me. My friends in Avon somehow brought that to deeper places.

along the way



BY BISHOP MATTHEW H. CLARK

When I got home from the picnic, I sat down to jot some notes about what was on my mind that afternoon. They included experiences or ideas that have been helpful to me and that I judge to be of special importance at this time. I share them with you with the hope that they might be helpful to you:

1) It is very important for me to try to put words on feelings, especially when they are intense and when, unchecked, they would lead me in ways that do not serve life — my own or others'. I am deeply grateful that I have friends with whom I can do that.

2) I know that this is not a one-way street. One cannot reasonably hope to receive the gift of another's attention without being willing to listen respectfully and reverently to the stories he or she would want to share with us.

3) The importance of prayer stands in high relief at times like this. Crowded temples, mosques and churches are public signs of this. I know I look for more quiet opportunity to pray in such circumstances than I normally do. My guess is that I am not alone in that.

4) One of the fruits of such prayer is that it allows us to step back spiritually from the intensity of the moment. We can be intentionally and consciously in touch with the best val-

ues of our faith and moral tradition. When that happens, I believe we respond more wisely than we can when we are driven by raw, cutting emotion.

5) The vast majority of adherents of Islam are lovers of peace who care about the same things we do — family, freedom, justice and a decent, respectful life. That is most certainly true of the Muslim people I know in this community. I am deeply saddened to know that some Muslim sisters and brothers in our area have been abused verbally and even threatened with physical violence. They do not deserve that. I hope that we will all speak and act against such conduct whenever we encounter it.

6) How are we helping our children to deal with the images of violence to which we have been exposed? I find some of the images we have seen to be horrifying. I can only imagine the impact they have on the little ones.

7) People grieve in a variety of ways. Some need to connect with people, stay totally updated on every piece of breaking news and continually verbalize what is going on inside them. Others tend to seek out silence and the opportunity it offers to pray and to think through issues like freedom, sin, mortality, faith, hope and love. We all seek to make some sense out of what we have experienced, to locate it in a larger vision, to be positive and constructive in putting the pieces together again. For that we will need great patience with ourselves — and with one another.

8) With God's grace we will respond to this horror in a way that leaves us at peace with ourselves, true to the Gospel and faithful to the values upon which our nation was established.

Peace to all.

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