

## **Let Us Celebrate the Human Spirit**

By Mary Mitchell

“The greatest threat to our American way of life is not communism or the cold war, I believe. It is, rather, man’s inhumanity to his fellow man.”

The words of Milton Eisenhower, younger brother of Ike and former president of Johns Hopkins University, echoed in my head and heart last week.

And it was an oddly small thing that set them off.

### **Just a Newspaper, But ...**

My friend Mike walked into our neighborhood coffee shop on September 12, 2001, in search of caffeine and a newspaper.

His New York Times, delivered daily, was late – an understandable glitch after the horrors of the day before.

Then, Mike realized that his paper had arrived on time – neighbors had theirs - but someone had stolen his.

I was speechless. With thousands of people dead, maimed, dying or trapped in the hellfire ruins of the September 11th apocalypse – with thousands of families ripped apart forever – we’re still casually ripping each other off?

### **So Many Examples of Love In Action**

Here we are, damning the heinous crimes against a nation all the while engaging in petty inhumanities against our very neighbors. What’s wrong with this picture?

Shouldn’t those of us who are left here, alive and healthy, love each other a little bit more instead?

Shouldn’t we look for the gifts of the human spirit that are being offered?

Consider the bravery and generosity of the firefighters and law enforcers who are on the scenes, putting their own personal, visceral horror aside for a greater good. Or the “guerrilla volunteers” - those people who simply showed up at the attack sites willing to help with the lowliest chores – and stayed around the clock for days.

Shouldn’t we do our best to focus on what love remains in our world, appreciate it and make it grow?

If ever there were a time to engage in random acts of kindness, that time is now. A quick “how are you?” telephone call or e-mail can mean everything to someone who is alone and afraid. A simple meal shared can be a huge favor.

When the world is upside-down, there is strength and peace in just being there for each other.

### **Be Part of the Solution**

We are all so different. We must remember that and not expect each other to react to things the way we do. Each of us has our own set of perception glasses – our own educational, geographic, cultural and racial filters – through which we see the world and its people.

Each person reacts to tragedy differently. Some need to withdraw, at least for a while. Some need to talk; some, to sleep; some, to laugh.

All of us need to love. And none of us needs to pilfer papers.

Remember the old saw? “You’re either part of the problem or part of the solution.”

Guess which part the pilferers occupy? They’re over there in the first section, along with the road ragers, the short-changers, the casual bigots and other contributors to the drip-drip-drip of daily injury and disrespect that erodes our community’s integrity and compassion.

People today often scoff at the idea of “good manners” as if they were some arcane artifacts from great-grandma’s attic.

Yet manners are not about fish forks. They are nothing more – and nothing less – than expressions of decency and respect for one other.

Disregard these small courtesies, these small displays of human understanding for too long, and eventually we will lose all connection to one another – and all respect for human life.

That’s how wars start, and people suffer and die.

### **An 800-Year-Old Prayer**

St. Francis of Assisi understood all of this. Eight hundred years later, it is still hard to improve on his counsel:

“Lord, make me a channel of thy peace.  
That where there is hatred, I may bring love;  
that where there is wrong, I may bring the spirit of forgiveness;  
that where there is discord, I may bring harmony,  
that where there is error, I may be truth;  
that where there is doubt, I may bring faith;  
that where there is despair, I may bring hope;  
that where there are shadows, I may bring light;  
that where there is sorrow, I may bring joy.

"Lord grant that I may seek rather to comfort than to be comforted; to understand than to be understood; to love than to be loved.

"For it is by giving that one receives, it is by self-forgetting that one finds, it is by forgiving that one is forgiven, and it is by dying to self that one awakens to eternal life."