May 31, 2020 | Pentecost

Reach Out and Touch Someone—Not!

by Linda Robinson

We were seven weeks into the COVID quarantine when our grandson excitedly anticipated his “double-digits birthday.” Birthdays in our family always call for a party, but this year was to be different. Following several conversations with his parents, and mutual assurances that everyone had been following the social distancing rules and wearing PPE (Personal Protective Equipment) when out and about, we settled on a short visit and agreed not to touch.

The day of our visit was sunny and warm, so we stayed outdoors and carefully kept the appropriate distance, which, with just six people, was rather easy to do. In a normal time, we would gather as a larger family where there would be hugs all around, kids playing basketball and video games, laughter, sharing food, and singing “Happy Birthday,” but for now, safer, lower-key behaviors were essential.

Joni Mitchell sings, “You don’t know what you got ‘til it’s gone.” The greater truth might be we knew what we had, but never thought that we’d lose it. The experience of social distancing has impacted many aspects of our lives. A recent Facebook meme read, “Do you know how hard it is not to hug when you are a hugger at heart? The struggle is real.” Yet, limiting our physical interaction with those outside our homes is a minor inconvenience if it means keeping all around us safe.

Behavioral scientists tell us of the importance of touch from the moment of birth. Immediately following the birth of a baby, a newborn is placed naked, skin-to-skin, on the mother’s chest or belly to begin the bonding process. Touch is essential for survival. Babies born prematurely or whose condition at birth requires long term care are cuddled and rocked by volunteers recruited to serve this purpose. The human need to touch and be touched is a constant throughout our lives. These experiences reflect our desire for intimacy, our desire to open ourselves to others.

Throughout this pandemic, we have heard the tragic accounts of people who were dying alone as families were required to stay away for their protection. Contrast the image of a dying person surrounded and being embraced by loved ones with that of a nurse in full protective gear mediating a FaceTime call to family to say their final goodbyes. Even the caring touch of nurses for these patients was diminished by layers of personal protective equipment. Yet, despite these physical barriers, hospital caregivers held the hands of the dying so they felt some comfort and less alone.

Touch brings healing. Think of the tactile nature of the healing professions and pastoral ministries. In Scripture, we read how Jesus’ touch healed and

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brought comfort to many, for example, he touches the hand of Peter’s mother-in-law (Matthew 8:14-17); places his fingers into the ears and tongue of the deaf-mute of Decapolis (Mark 7:31-37); mixes his saliva and mud and put it on the eyes of the man who born blind (John 9:1-12); places his hands on an infirm woman on the Sabbath (Luke 13:10-17); touches the bier of the widow’s dead son (Luke 7:11-15)—just to name a few.

Consider the myriad ways we offer an embrace, a pat on the back, or a light touch on someone’s arm to convey love, sympathy, and support. When we need healing and comfort, we seek contact with another human being, even physically leaning on that person for strength and support. In Scripture we see the sick hoping simply to touch Jesus so that they might be healed: (Matthew 14:34-36); and the woman with a hemorrhage (Matthew 9:18-26). Today, crowds press close to Pope Francis who frequently reaches out to the infirm with an embrace. The Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick involves the touch of the sick person by the priest as he anoints with oil, and we touch and have our heads touched in blessing.

Sometimes we need to touch another in order to understand better. I think of the Doubter, Thomas, as he was invited by the resurrected Christ to touch his wounds so that he might believe; or when we touch in wonder, the tiny fingers and toes of an infant, or caress an object of exquisite beauty in order to fully appreciate it.

When we are able to come together again as a parish community, there will be constraints on physical proximity and most certainly touch. Until that time, we rely on our words to heal and comfort or to touch someone’s heart. For now, the space between us is our gift to each other.

Sick involves the touch of the sick person by the priest as he anoints with oil, and we touch and have our heads touched in blessing.

Among many other things, Linda Robinson is a parishioner, spiritual director, and adjunct professor of religious studies at Chestnut Hill College.

Front page image: A few of the ‘space pads’ graciously donated by MuralArts Philadelphia to Faith, Food & Friends, to help our guests maintain a safe distance when they pick up a hot meal on Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Saturdays.

In your prayers, please remember our sick and homebound brothers and sisters, our ministry at Pennsylvania Hospital and all those who have asked for our prayers.

George Bernato, Debbie Brooks, Ann Crowther, Jane Crowther, Mary Kay Crowther, Barbara Epting, Owen Petrzelka, Philip Press, Matthew Smith, Sara Smith, Sharon Winge and Pat Yusko.

If you wish to have someone included on the parish prayer list, please call BJ Brown at 215-923-1733 or email bjbrown@oldstjoseph.org.
Announcements

Catholic Relief Services and COVID-19
COVID-19 is affecting people all over the world. As you know, those who Catholic Relief Services (CRS) serves are always the hardest hit by any catastrophe. The COVID-19 pandemic is no exception. CRS has established a Lead the Way on Hunger Campaign to address the global need as food sources become scarcer in vulnerable parts of the world. Visit crs.org/get-involved/lead-way for more information.

Hunger and Housing Assistance
Visit phil.gov/food/#/ for information on free food and meal sites during the COVID-19 epidemic. The site includes information about student and senior meals. The city has also launched a COVID-19 Emergency Rental Assistance program. Visit philrentassist.org for information and to apply. Finally, the Familis First Coronavirus Response Act authorized a new benefit called Pandemic EBT (Electronic Benefit Transfer) to help families with children who are eligible for free or reduced-price school meals. Search “just harvest” and P-EBT for more information on how to apply.

On Re-opening Old St. Joseph’s
The full text of Fr. Walter Modrys SJ’s letter on re-opening Old St. Joseph’s is available on the homepage of our website, oldstjoseph.org.

Litany of the Sacred Heart
Friday, June 5, 2020 is the first Friday of June. The Litany of the Sacred Heart, a traditional prayer ritual for first Fridays, will be posted in audio at oldstjoseph.org that day.

Stay in Touch
Although our church building remains closed, Old St. Joseph’s parish staff remains available to you during office hours. You can reach any staff member at 215-923-1733. Emails are listed on the next page of this bulletin and on our website, oldstjoseph.org—where you can still find daily reflections posted at noon on Monday-Saturday. In addition, keep an eye on our Facebook page (@OSJ19106) for more frequent updates and links to opportunities for prayer and action during the pandemic.
INFORMATION

Pastor
Fr. Walter Modrys SJ (pastor@oldstjoseph.org)

Parochial Vicar
Fr. Francis Hannafey SJ (fhannafey@oldstjoseph.org)

In Residence
Br. Robert Carson SJ
Fr. Ed O’Donnell SJ (eodonnell@oldstjoseph.org)

Pastoral Associate
BJ Brown (bjbrown@oldstjoseph.org)

Business Manager
Eric German (germane@oldstjoseph.org)

Director of Music
Mark Bani (music@oldstjoseph.org)

Parish Offices
(parishoffice@oldstjoseph.org)

Religious Education (PREP) Coordinator
Christine Szczepanowski (prep@oldstjoseph.org)

Faith, Food & Friends Director
Deborah Hluchan (faithandfriends@oldstjoseph.org)

Director of Hospital Ministry
Tom Volkert (hospitalEM@oldstjoseph.org)

Rectory Office Hours
Monday through Friday: 9:30 AM to 4:30 PM
Sunday: 9:00 AM to 2:00 PM

Mass Times
Monday through Saturday: 12:05 PM
Saturday Vigil Mass for Sunday: 5:30 PM
Sunday: 7:30, 9:30, 11:30 AM and 6:30 PM
Holy Days: 12:05 and 7:00 PM

Medical Emergency
In a medical emergency when the need for a priest is urgent, please call the rectory.

Hearing Enhancements
Old St. Joseph’s is equipped with an audio hearing loop. Switch on the T-coil function of your device to use the loop. Booklets with the Sunday readings are available in the rear of the church.

Registration
Registration forms are available in the rectory office during normal office hours, on the bookcases in the back of the church and online at www.oldstjoseph.org. They can be returned to the parish office by mail or in person.

Sacrament of Reconciliation
A priest is available for the Sacrament of Reconciliation Monday through Saturday from 11:30 AM–12:00 PM or by appointment.

Sacrament of Baptism
If you want to arrange a baptism, please contact Fr. Hannafey (fhannafey@oldstjoseph.org) at least two months before the desired date.

Eucharist for the Homebound
To arrange to receive Communion at home, please contact the parish offices.

The Sacrament of Anointing
The Sacrament of Anointing (the sacrament of the sick) is offered during the 12:05 PM Mass on the first Saturday of each month. Homebound or hospitalized persons wanting to receive the Sacrament of Anointing should call the parish office.

Sacrament of Matrimony
If you want to be married at Old St. Joseph’s, please visit our website, oldstjoseph.org and read the material under the heading Weddings. Please call the parish office at 215-923-1766 at least nine months before your desired wedding date.

Rite of Christian Initiation
If you are an adult wishing to be baptized, or to receive First Eucharist and Confirmation, or are a baptized non-Catholic seeking full communion with Catholic Church, please call the parish office or email rcia@oldstjoseph.org.

Mass of Christian Burial
To schedule a funeral or memorial Mass, ask your funeral director to call the parish office.

Parish Pastoral Council
(osjpc@oldstjoseph.org)

Parish Finance Council
Paul Shay, chair

Historic Preservation Corporation Board
Fr. Walter Modrys SJ, president

Adult Education
Rita O’Brien and Jeanmarie Zippo (adulted@oldstjoseph.org)

Eldership
Pat Nelson (eldership@oldstjoseph.org)

Parish Life
Joe Casey (parishlife@oldstjoseph.org)

Ignatian Spirituality and Formation
Len Mancini (osjspirituality@oldstjoseph.org)

Women, Faith and Fellowship
Rana McNamara (wff@oldstjoseph.org)

Young Adult Community
(osjyac@gmail.com)

Altar Servers
Maria Ramirez (altarserver@oldstjoseph.org)

Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion
Bill Stewart (EM@oldstjoseph.org)

Hospital Ministry
Luanne Balestrucci (hospitalEM@oldstjoseph.org)

Homebound Ministry
Neal Hébert (homeEM@oldstjoseph.org)

Lectors
Lou Anne Bulik (lectors@oldstjoseph.org)

Ushers
Nikola Sizgorich (ushers@oldstjoseph.org)

Children’s Liturgy of the Word
Peggy Connolly (clow@oldstjoseph.org)
God Bless America

Please Continue To Pray For

World Peace

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