

Follow practical tips for preventing spread of H1N1

There's a parable told of an angel walking into a city just as the plague was walking out of the city. The angel said to the plague: "You should be ashamed of yourself for killing all those people!" The plague replied: "I only killed a few. Fear killed the rest."

The media seems to feed fears of all kinds. Not the least of which, today, is the H1N1 Virus - the Swine Flu. Recently I read an e-mail addressed to Monsignor Armstrong (rector of The Cathedral of Mary Our Queen in Homeland) with suggestions of ways to prevent catching the flu. The ideas come from a Dr. Vinay Goyal, and seem extremely practical. Here are a few of his suggestions:

1. Frequent hand washing. I have found that after I wash my own hands in a public restroom that I always use the same paper towel to open the door. Imagine how many hands have touched that door.
2. Hands off the face. Resist all temptations to touch any part of the face unless you want to eat or bathe. The portals of entry for the flu are the nostrils and mouth/throat.
3. Gargle twice a day with warm salt water (use Listerine if you don't trust salt). H1N1 takes 2-3 days after initial infection in the throat/nasal cavity to proliferate and show characteristic symptoms. Simple gargling prevents proliferation. In a way, gargling with salt water has the same effect on a healthy individual that Tamiflu has on an infected one. Don't underestimate this simple, inexpensive and powerful preventative method.
4. Clean your nostrils at least once a day with cotton buds dipped in warm salt water. Blowing the nose hard once a day and swabbing both nostrils with cotton buds dipped in warm salt water is very effective in bringing down viral population. Here I would also add Dr. Oshinski's advice. He is an ear, throat, and nose specialist. His suggestion before touching your nose is to wash your hands twice.

5. “Boost your own natural immunity with foods that are rich in Vitamin C. If you supplement with Vitamin C tablets, make sure that it also has zinc to boost absorption.”

6. “Drink as much warm liquids (tea, coffee, hot water, etc) as you can. Drinking warm liquids has the same effect as gargling but in the reverse direction. They wash off proliferating viruses from the throat into the stomach where they cannot survive, proliferate, or do any harm.”

Those are eminently practical suggestions, aren't they? They could save your life.

Allow me to suggest a few liturgical suggestions.

I celebrate Mass regularly at Oak Crest. To prevent colds and infections, only the priest drinks from the chalice. No one else, not even the extraordinary ministers of holy Communion, drink from the chalice. Liturgical purity calls for drinking from the one cup. Unfortunately, we can be dead right. Better to be safe.

Second, there are no handshakes or kisses at the sign of peace. We wave, smile or find some other “safe” sign of peace.

Third, outside the chapel, on the altar, outside dining areas, hand cleansers abound.

Fourth, I would encourage people to think about receiving Communion in the hand, not on the tongue. Yes, our hands can carry germs. But, as Dr. Oshinki pointed out, our noses and mouths are among the dirtiest parts of our bodies. When I place the Body of Christ on peoples' tongues, I invariably feel like I'm passing along saliva from person to person. Piety is one thing. Prudence is another. Jesus said that he came that “we might have life and life to the fullest”. Let's enjoy the fullness of life as long as possible on this side of time, rather than hastening our entrance into eternity!

Finally, please take all my suggestions with a ‘grain of salt’. After all, I'm Father Joe, not Dr. Joe!