

While I was visiting hospitals this week one of our parishioners introduced me to another patient on the corridor. She said, "Father, this is Agnes. Agnes, this is Father Turner." Now, Agnes uses a wheelchair, appeared to be 80 at least and, God bless her, she could not hear very well. She screwed up her face, looked at our parishioner, and asked for a clarification, "This is Roger Turner?" "No, Father Turner, this is my priest." In the next 60 seconds I learned a lot about Agnes. She was angry; she didn't want to be in a hospital; her family put her there; she wasn't really sick. I can't tell you whether or not she belonged there, but this much was clear: Agnes felt aimlessly detached from her family and the world. I think I'd be angry too. And truth be told, a good many other people experience the same thing. I don't mean just the elderly. There are many able-bodied persons, much younger in age, with two good legs, who also feel aimlessly detached from family and the world. It's a horrible way to live; we meet people like that every day. Some like Agnes are helplessly trapped; others could reconnect if they were willing to commit.

The drama unfolding in the Senate this week risks the same issues. It's important for an individual to be connected with a local community and a broader community. The polls tell us our president connects with the national community, but not with the Washington community. But if you don't have both it's hard to achieve your purpose.

When Pope John Paul II arrives in Saint Louis next week he will suddenly bring the global mission of the church to our minds in a dynamic way. He will remind us that the Catholic faith is not just something we hold individually, but something with a local and global purpose. It's important to keep all those dimensions together. Anytime individual Catholics feel distant from the global church, they will feel as angry as Agnes in the hospital.

The very brief second reading at today's mass opens Paul's first letter to the Corinthians. I think the second reading on any Sunday is the one part of mass that the most people sleep through. Today offers a great example why. This reading doesn't say a whole lot except for the formalities that go with letter writing: "From Paul, to the Corinthians," is about all it says, like "Agnes, this is Father Turner." But noteworthy is that Paul identifies the Corinthians with a beautiful expression: "the church of God that is in Corinth," the church of God. Paul is the first writer in the new testament to use that expression; he calls the people who believe in Jesus the church. It has a global meaning; for Paul, church meant everyone who called on the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. But it also has a local meaning. Right there in Corinth, you could find church. The Corinthians were church because of what they believed and because of the mission they shared. Church works best when individual, local, and global are all on the same page.

When it comes to the institutions we love, be they family, nation, or church, some people, like Agnes, are just helpless. They don't have the opportunity to connect. But others can if they're willing to recommit. Very often the source of our anger is the loss of common purpose. We thought we had a commitment going; we don't; we get angry -- at family, at politics, at church. At those times it's good to recall who we are, what

we value, and to whom we are connected. It's in those big connections where we find our common purpose.