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The discussion on gun control should begin at Mass

Mario T. García | Dec. 18, 2012 NCR Today

The massacre at Newtown, Conn., has shocked the nation. I am stunned and moved about these senseless murders of so many young and innocent children and of their teachers, some who gave up their lives trying to protect the children. My heart and prayers go out to their grieving families.

There is little comfort that can be given with such an overwhelming loss. It is a parent's worst nightmare. I can't imagine having lost my daughter and son when they were 6 or 7, the ages of the children killed, when they were first starting to go to school. I would be devastated. Can life go on without our children? It can, but there would always be that vacuum, that loss, those memories of our kids.

It is because the victims were mostly children that I believe the shooting has so moved most Americans. We can imagine the horror of being in the place of those parents who lost their babies. But we have had other mass killings before, even this year, and people including politicians say we now have to do something about it. President Barack Obama at the memorial service on Sunday said this. But what? And how long will this sentiment remain? Can we have effective gun control? No, opponents including the NRA say, because guns don't kill, people kill. And what about the Second Amendment and the right to bear arms?

I have a feeling that because of the particular nature of the Newtown killings involving so many young children that perhaps -- perhaps -- there is an opening for federal legislation that at least prohibits or limits the sale of weapons of mass destruction like automatic weapons that might be enacted by the next Congress. It's still a long shot, given the power of the gun lobbyists and the foolishness of too many Americans believing guns can protect them. Guns are meant to injure and to kill, and the more that are available, the greater the possibility of that happening. But in order for any gun control law to pass, we as citizens need to be engaged in pushing for such control. We need to first talk about this issue in our families, among our neighbors and friends, at our city council meetings, at our universities and in our churches.

Yes, in our churches, in our Catholic churches. Yes, we prayed at Sunday Mass for the victims of this horrendous crime, but no mention was made of what the clergy is going to do beyond praying to deal with this problem. Our clergy has to take some leadership in discussing the issue of gun control,l and it should begin with their homilies. "Thou shall not kill." Why not begin there? If Catholic clergy feel it is appropriate to preach against federal health legislation that the church believes allows birth control and abortion, then it should also have the courage to preach against 300 million guns that Americans, including many Catholics, currently own.

If you believe abortions need to be outlawed, then you also need to accept that guns that kill thousands of Americans every year have to be outlawed, or at least significantly controlled. Let's at least have that debate. And if clergy are too timid to do so at Mass, then let them organize that discussion in the church hall. But let's have that debate in our churches. Jesus not only prayed; he acted against those who hurt others. He was proactive, and so too must our clergy be. We can't wait until a mass deranged murderer steps into our nearby Catholic elementary school.

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