



Suicide: Comforting those who mourn

This article has been slightly edited from the one written by Sr Janet Fearn found in the UK Bishop's Conference Day for Life 2009 Campaign to raise awareness of the problem of suicide. More resources can be found at www.dayforlife.org

Why...?

Suicide is a tragedy. Whatever the motive might have been, the family never fully gets over the pain or the questions. Each family member will spend the rest of his or her days wondering what could have been said or done to prevent such a death. All too often, in spite of the queries, the answer is that there was probably nothing that would have made a difference. Until the very last spark of life was extinguished, the one who died knew that there was a place where, regardless of everything, those who loved him or her would have shed their own last drop of blood to protect and defend someone who was so precious and central to their own lives.

Why that fact was blocked out during that final, terrible, deed is part of the agony that lasts a lifetime for those left behind, who learn to live with their loss but never fully come to terms with it. There will never be a moment when the family will not be in pain, knowing that one of their own could be hurting in a way that they were unable to soothe. Theirs will always be the torment of knowing that their love was insufficient to ease whatever troubled someone they loved. They will experience an initial grief, disbelief, anger, resentment, questions, confusion and, often, an unwillingness to forgive the one who has died.

Gradually, very gradually, there is a growing realisation that life must carry on. Perhaps understanding and forgiveness may take a lifetime to appear. Not all the questions will find an answer. There will always be an "if only" and, however well-adjusted the family members might be, there is a sadness that does not vanish. As someone said, "You learn to live with it, but you never get over it."

Sometimes it is relatively easy to understand that so-and-so couldn't face illness, dependence, financial ruin or disgrace. Perhaps there was a desire not to be a burden on the family. Who knows? Most suicides probably have mixed motives. Nobody simply wakes up one morning and decides to commit suicide. We all hang on to life, even when it is painful. At the very root of suicide is suffering that seems to take hold and mask everything else.

Reaching out for a misguided hope

We might never know or understand what that anguish might be, but, in a way, perhaps there are times when suicide might almost be an act of hope that there is something beyond this life, somewhere free from hurt, somewhere beautiful, forgiving, understanding and peaceful. That which might appear to be an act of despair might actually be a misguided act of hope on the part

of someone who no longer saw life and love as clearly as those who loved him would have wanted for him. God never, ever, turns away someone who is suffering, never ever rejects anybody who turns towards him.

Outwardly, suicide seems to be an act of despair, but it is entirely possible that the individual's very last thought on this earth was one of total and utter abandonment into God's loving arms. God is neither blind nor deaf. God sees the heart. We don't. If God were to ignore someone in pain, he would not be God.

There is another way in which God manages to bring good even out of the horror of suicide. Often, in its inability to understand the tragedy forced upon it, a family draws even closer together, becoming more understanding towards others, more compassionate towards those who have considered, or who have succeeded in, killing themselves. It is harder to be judgmental, easier to become better people.

Mary Queen of Sorrows, comforter of the Afflicted

I know that I've quoted the story before, but the tale is told of a monk with an extremely quick temper, who collapsed and died during one of his outbursts. His community



decided that there was no way in which their brother could have been forgiven such an act and so they didn't bother praying for him. Then the night came when God asked the abbot for an explanation. The abbot blustered out his answer. "Ah yes", replied God. "You thought he died because he lost his temper. I know he died because he was trying so hard to keep it."

Where suicide is concerned, there are no easy answers. Those who "trot out a quick fix" merely show their ignorance and lack of understanding. For the one who died and those who are left behind, they are, in a unique way, caught up in the mystery of the Crucifixion. The Cross only made sense in hindsight. It was only after the Resurrection that Calvary could be seen to have a meaning. The darkness of Good Friday led to the glory of Easter Sunday. The joy of Easter Sunday

did not remove the agony of Good Friday, but it did make sense of it. Mary could never, ever, forget standing at the foot of the Cross, but her despair led to joy. It was Calvary that, more than anything else, made Mary truly our Mother.

The only place where suicide and its effects on the family can be adequately understood and explained is in the context of the Passion, Death and Resurrection of Jesus and the readiness of Mary to walk along that same Via Dolorosa as her Son, not knowing it would ultimately lead to a Via Gloriosa.

For many of us, the suicide of a family member is our personal Via Dolorosa, something we never imagined or sought. Yet, with Jesus and Mary and with faith, trust and the loving support of others, we will also discover our own Via Gloriosa.

Prayer in Time of Suicide - By Fr Benedict Groeschel CFR

Lord Jesus Christ, I have no place else to go but to kneel at the foot of the Cross. The death of someone so dear to me in this awful way leaves me completely confused and disoriented. It is so bitter. I am haunted by the thought that I could have done something, that I might have prevented this terrible disaster. But I don't know. I must entrust my dear one to You. There is no place else to turn. My dear one, now taken from me by the weakness of the human mind, by the inability to cope with the difficulties of life, by the wounds of mental illness, I place in Your hands. I trust completely in You that I will see those who have died this way again. I trust that, by Your precious blood and divine mercy in the last moments of life, You receive them, understanding that they have been defeated by life; and that, in no way, did they mean to go against Your will and Your law. Help us, O Lord, in this darkness to find You and to believe in Your Cross. Amen.*

*Fr Groeschel wrote a longer version of this prayer when he experienced a suicide of a disturbed young man who took his life when his girlfriend rejected him. "Since I lived through a suicide long ago, I write this prayer just for those who know".

Family Life Society Counseling Services

Our professional therapists journey with and help anyone in crisis including those who are feeling suicidal and those who have lost a loved one to suicide in a safe and non-threatening environment.

Please call 64880278 to make an appointment

Volunteers needed to take appointments for parish counseling service

If you could spare sometime on weekdays, have a pleasant and friendly disposition, know how to use email and hope to do your bit in reaching out to individuals and families in need, you may want to consider volunteering with us to help take appointment and handle enquires about our parish counseling service.

Interested persons should call Nick at 6488 0278 or email nickchui@familylife.sg



Family Life Society Tel: 6488 0278
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If you have a personal story to share, comments or feedback to give, please feel free to email to nickchui@familylife.sg