

My heart goes out to you, Mr. & Mrs. [REDACTED], and to you [REDACTED]'s siblings: [REDACTED], to Grandma [REDACTED], to [REDCATED]'s many aunts & uncles & cousins. It is with great difficulty that I stand before you knowing the pain and anguish you are going through. But I am aware, as well, that I am only a humble, unworthy mouthpiece. I ask God to use my words to bring the light, comfort and healing you need.

Is there any hope to offer in this moment? Must we **only** speak of our profound grief, our indescribable sorrow, even our anger and confusion at how such a thing could have happened? Is there any word from God that might break into our darkness like a ray of light?

Yes, yes, a thousand times. If we Christians are right in believing that salvation belongs to Jesus Christ, that it does not come from us--and that our hand cannot stop what God allows for us, then **yes**, there is hope in eternity even for those who take their own lives.

Having said that, I think that we must not call what is bad good, what is wrong right. Because we are Christians, we must say what we know is the truth – that taking your own life is against God who made us and against everyone who loves us. Our lives are not our own. They are not ours to do with as we please. God gave us life, and we are to be good stewards of that gift for as long as God permits.

The finality of suicide makes this all the worse. You cannot make things right again. Neither can [REDACTED]. And this is much of the pain of it all. Things are left unresolved, even if it felt to [REDACTED] like this was the only way to resolve things. You want to turn the clock back and say, *"Please don't give up. We can work*

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*through this pain together.* " But now you will have to work through this pain by yourselves, or with those close to you now who will need to lean on you even as you lean on them.

On most people's mind, however, especially of us who call ourselves Christians, on **our** minds as we sit in this place is: *Can God forgive and heal this?* Yes, God CAN forgive even the taking of one's own life. In fact, God awaits us with his mercy, with ever open arms. Sacred Scripture says clearly: *God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us* (Romans 5:8). God's abiding mercy is what sets us to ask for it. Although God doesn't dangle his mercy like a carrot, waiting for us to ask for it in order to receive it, we do **have to believe in our hearts, express with our words, and show in our actions** – that it is always **there**. God wants nothing but our salvation **but** he will never force himself on us, he will not save us without us. That's how much he loves us. Because of the all-embracing sacrifice of Christ on the cross God **can** have mercy on any sin. Yes, because of his mercy, God **can** forgive suicide and heal **what has been broken**.

Because God is merciful he makes allowance for the spiritual, mental, and emotional despair that leads to suicide. God is able to read the heart, to know the whole truth of a person's life, and thereby to pass sentence with mercy. God knows something **we** must discipline ourselves to do in these moments – he knows not to judge a person's entire life on the basis of the worst and last choice the person made. God can look at the totality of a human being's life and celebrate all the good that came from it, even while taking seriously the tragic choice that ended everything. And **then** he shows his mercy and love in ways beyond our limited understanding.

*Nothing can separate us from the love of God*, the great St. Paul assures us (in that Reading we just listened to). Nothing – including suicide.

*Who will bring any charge against God's chosen ones?* St. Paul asks. *It is God who acquits us. Who will condemn?* Christ Jesus sits at the right hand of God even now, interceding for this one who could not stand before God on his/her own. Truly, none of us can stand before God on our own. We all need Christ to intercede for us, to plead our case. And here's the good news: Christ has never lost a case!

*What will separate us from the love of Christ?* St. Paul answers that question with a display of words that cover everything he can think of in so little space. Not death or life, not angels or principalities, not present things or future things, not powers or height or depth or any other creature will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

What did St. Paul leave out of that list? Nothing. He did not list suicide, but he did not list murder or gossip or greed either. He covered all of those things in the final flurry of words that includes anything else in all creation. No deed is too evil to be beyond the forgiveness of Christ. No tragedy is too great to separate us from the love of God.

If that is so, if the Scriptures can be believed, if God can be trusted even in this, then it gives us hope and guidance for how to manage our **sorrow** and **anger** and **loss**. We give it all to God. We hope...we can only hope. We do not carry it ourselves. We try to give thanks for the blessings of life we knew and shared with [REDACTED], with this child of God. And we remind ourselves that **he** is not lost to God who seeks to save all of his children.

And so, we take great comfort and consolation in all this. Nothing-not even suicide-can separate us from the unconditional love of God. It is to this all-merciful love that we, through our prayers, entrust and continue to entrust the soul of [REDACTED]. Let us not deny him now of the help he needs most-our love expressed through our trusting prayers.

My dear friends, today, and in the difficult days to come, when darkness threatens to envelop and darken our hearts, let us raise high the bright light of our Redeemer and proclaim his saving mercy: *Praised be Jesus Christ, now and for ever!*