

Suicide again, 2012  
Parish Diary  
Fr. Peter Daly  
June 7, 2012

*Fr. Peter Daly discusses the death of a friend and the way the Church now deals with suicide.*

Two weeks ago, a good friend of mine went out into his garden, on a lovely spring day, and shot himself in the heart. He died instantly. He was 71 years old.

My friend was super smart, full of ironic humor and serious thoughts. He was an engineer by training, but he was an artist by avocation. He could make anything out of wood. He was a master photographer. At his funeral we recalled that he had the mind of a scientist and the soul of a mystic.

He was married and had three wonderful children and seven grandchildren. He was a loving and somewhat zany “papa.”

When I got the telephone call, I was having lunch. My secretary said, “Something terrible has happened.” I drove over to my friend’s house immediately. Eight police cars were parked in the cull-de-sac outside the house. A detective was just putting up yellow crime scene tape across the driveway. They let me pass under the tape.

As I walked down the steep drive way I felt weak, almost dizzy. I couldn’t bear to look at him lying there near the garden path. So I paused about 20 feet away and said a prayer with my eyes closed. I kept repeating under my breath, “What have you done?”

Inside the house his wife and I hugged each other. No words were appropriate or needed.

My friend had been sick a long time. He had heart trouble. The prognosis was not good. He also had struggled with depression, off and on over many years, perhaps a side effect of medication.

He had overcome many things in his 71 years. Just the Saturday before he died, he had received his 20 year chip from A.A. The Thursday before, we had just finished the text and layout for a picture book we were writing together about the stained glass and art in our church. At the end of the day he and I and his wife had gone out to celebrate with his favorite dinner, soft shell crabs.

When I got out of his car that night he said, “This has been a good day.” I answered, “Yes it has.” We were two old friends, sharing a moment. Then he was gone.

His funeral was joyful and tearful.

Fifty years ago, there never would have been a funeral like that in a Catholic Church. When I was a boy, the church might have refused him a funeral and burial in consecrated ground. But my friend had a church full of mourners and two priests and two deacons on the altar.

In my homily I quoted from the Greek poet Aeschylus, “Even in our sleep, pain that cannot forget, comes drop by drop. Until at last comes wisdom, by the awful grace of God.”

I prayed to God, “Send me some understanding.”

A day later, I turned on the TV late at night. It was on Bloomberg Financial News, a channel I never watch. Charlie Rose and his guests on TV were having a serious discussion of depression and suicide. Understanding by the grace of God!

One man described how he felt when he was depressed. It was like a deep pit, he said. I thought of my friend. So sad that he felt that way. When people are profoundly depressed, they can't see a way out. Their pain is real.

So now my friend is gone. I am confident he is with God.

I'm glad we had a funeral filled with sorrow and joy. One thing the church has learned in the last half century is that the mercy of God is greater than our understanding.