

Death at Rutgers: In the Wake of Tragedy, a Way Forward

STUDENTS at Rutgers University turned this past Friday into "Black Friday." Many of them wore black, mourning the tragic death of a university freshman who ended his life after being bullied by two other students. Moments before he jumped off the George Washington Bridge, Tyler Clementi posted a message on his Facebook page: "going to jump off the gw bridge sorry." What thoughts, what emotions, what feelings of utter hopelessness must have driven this talented and promising young man to end his life!



BISHOP ARTHUR J. SERRATELLI

Three days earlier, his privacy had been invaded. His roommate and a friend secretly filmed him in his dorm room in intimate moments with another man. Then, in an act of brazen disregard for the dignity and rights of their fellow student, they used a webcam to stream the video of the victim's sexual tryst publicly on the Internet. To make sport of someone else's life is shameful! This was a cruel act; a clear case of cyber bullying meant to out and embarrass, to ridicule and belittle.

A young man with a bright future gone. Two students with so much to learn about life and tolerance, respect and understanding, now facing criminal charges along with the pangs of conscience for their irresponsible actions. A family in grief. A community searching for ways to prevent this from ever happening again. So complex is this loss of life, this blatant disregard for another person, that no single response is possible.

In our country, every year, almost 5,000 young people between the ages of 15 and 24 end their lives. According to the Center for Disease Control, suicide is the third leading cause of death for this age group. Teen suicide is on the rise in the U.S. When young people feel anxious, stuck in a situation that seems without escape, when they experience depression and hopelessness, suicide becomes an answer. Suicide leaves behind a trail of tragedy. Any death is difficult, but there is a much heavier grief to face when some one ends his or her own life.

We need to stay connected to our young people. They need to know that we are there for them and

with them. They must experience and truly feel that our love goes beyond their inadequacies and failures because that is how God loves each of us.

Bullying, as in the case of the Rutgers student, is one of the major causes of suicide. Bullying has been around since the days of Cain and Abel. According to the National School Safety Center, one in every seven children faces bullying at school. Taunting and teasing are cruel schoolyard games. Today, in the age of email, Twitter and Facebook, the Internet magnifies the ability to torment others. The world is now the schoolyard. The harm is unlimited. And, those who bully others can do it without ever having to face the victim and see the harm inflicted.

Children learn from adults. What values are we passing on to them? We witness today the bitter politics of detraction. Political figures at times go beyond the issues and drag into their campaigns for office the sins of their opponents. Are our young people learning from adults that it is OK to tear down someone publicly and dismantle their good name? With increasing frequency, the sins of politicians, movies stars, and sports heroes are outed by the media. What does this teach our young about respecting privacy? Is there any respect for privacy permissible today?

Not simply by word, but by example, young people need to be taught respect for the other. Tolerance for others, whatever their culture, religion or sexual orientation, is an acquired virtue. Tolerance means respecting the person as created by God and destined for eternal life. While it does not mean acceptance of moral evil, it does mean not hating another in any circumstance.

Furthermore, those who engage in bullying need to be understood and to be helped. They may be acting out their fears about themselves. They may be engaging in behavior that they themselves have experienced. They cannot be excluded from our care.

When young students enter college, they step out

of the protective environment of their homes. They are challenged with values and behaviors at times not consistent with their own upbringing. They are searching for their own identity. The college student is not the finished product. Our universities have the responsibility to form their students as persons. Since the person is more than intellect, education means more than passing on knowledge.

In our secularized society, a university true to its mission, therefore, cannot marginalize religion or jettison morality. At the heart of every authentic religious tradition is compassion. At the center of all moral values is the respect for the other. There will always be failures. But the university that is faithful to its mission will be the place where the students' horizons are broadened, their minds opened to understanding and their hearts strengthened to love.

Tyler Clementi's last word was "sorry." We, too, are sorry, very sorry. In the wake of this tragedy, we need to find a way forward. Moved by our own sorrow, we turn to God. We pray for Tyler. May he know something that he did not experience in his last days. May he know the love of God who is mercy and compassion. We pray for his family and for all who knew him. May they find comfort and consolation as others grieve with them. We also pray for the two students whose bad choices contributed to this tragedy. They, too, are children of our loving God.

But there is more. We are all responsible for our own actions. And, actions have consequences. Our sinful choices ripple out in ever-widening circles touching others in ways we do not imagine. And so do our virtuous acts. We need to recognize what is evil and sinful in ourselves and seek to eliminate it first from our lives before we try to reform society. We need to choose each day to love those whom we encounter, even when we differ. When our lives are good and our choices moral, we create an environment where others can truly live.

AROUND OUR DIOCESE

Concert marks organist's anniversary

MADISON — St. Vincent Martyr Parish here will host a "Musical Extravaganza" at 3 p.m., Sunday, Nov. 7, featuring Linda Loria, who is celebrating her 20th anniversary as organist at St. Vincent's. The "Musical Extravaganza" will include other musicians who have performed with Loria at St. Vincent's: Merynda Adams, harp; Dr. Rich Gradone, trumpet; Liz Mancinelli, keyboard; Carol Tourgee, violin; Barbara Armenti, soprano, director of Music at St. Vincent's; and Joseph R. Loria,

baritone (Lioria's husband and cantor at Holy Trinity Parish, Westfield). In addition, the adult parish choirs, also joined by several former members, will raise their voices and ring their bells in celebration.

All are invited to attend this free concert at the church and a reception immediately following at the Ministry Center, both located at 26 Green Village Rd.

Information: (973) 377-4000.

SCRIPTURE READINGS

Week of October 10

Twenty-Eighth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Cycle C Readings:

1. 2 Kgs 5:14-17
2. Tm 2:8-13
3. Gospel: Luke 17:11-19

Monday Gal 4:22-24, 26-27, 31—5:1/Lk 11:29-32

Tuesday Gal 5:1-6/Lk 11:37-41

Wednesday Gal 5:18-25/Lk 11:42-46

Thursday [St. Callistus I, pope and martyr] Eph 1:1-10/Lk 11:47-54

Friday [St. Teresa of Jesus, virgin and doctor of the Church] Eph 1:11-14/Lk 12:1-7

Saturday [St. Hedwig, religious; St. Margaret Mary Alacoque, virgin; BVM] Eph 1:15-23/Lk 12:8-12

NJPA
NEW JERSEY PRESS ASSOCIATION

THE Beacon
NEWSPAPER OF THE DIOCESE OF PATERSON, N. J.

Vol. 44 • No. 37 • October 7, 2010

Published weekly on Thursday, 52 issues/yr.
Subscription Rates: \$29.50 yearly in New Jersey
 Out-of-state and foreign rates on request

Office of publication: 597 Valley Road, Clifton, N.J. 07013
Mail address: P.O. Box 1887, Clifton, N.J. 07015-1887
General E-mail: catholicbeacon@patersondiocese.org
Website: www.patersondiocese.org
Voice: (973) 279-8845 • Fax: (973) 279-2265

Bishop Arthur J. Serratelli, Publisher

Richard Sokerka Editor, General Manager • Ext. 20 rsbeacon@patersondiocese.org	Nancy Amato Production Associate • Ext. 24 nabeacon@patersondiocese.org
Michael Wojcik News Editor • Ext. 26 mwbeacon@patersondiocese.org	Steve Hodosko Display Advertising • Ext. 14 msbeacon@optonline.net
Cecile San Agustin Reporter • Ext. 18 csbeacon@patersondiocese.org	Joyce De Ceglie Administrative Assistant/ Bookkeeper/Circulation Manager Ext. 11 jdcbeacon@patersondiocese.org
Marc Stumbo Production Editor • Ext. 17 msbeacon@patersondiocese.org	