

February 9, 2020

## KOBE BRYANT'S DEATH IN HELICOPTER CRASH

On Sunday January 26, the shocking breaking news was: "Basketball Legend Kobe Bryant dies in helicopter crash". Another tragedy. Another "Sports Star" dying young. I am not a basketball fan. I am barely familiar with the success story of Kobe Bryant with the LA Lakers. Some of you may wonder why I chose to write about this tragic death. What drew my attention is that a few hours after the death of Kobe Bryant and his 13-year old daughter Gianna, several parishioners shared with me an immediate report by CATHOLIC NEWS AGENCY giving an amazing story about the conversion of Kobe Bryant over 15 years ago. While he was born in a Catholic family and received all the sacraments early on, it is only an encounter with a CATHOLIC PRIEST that changed his way of life as he was facing allegations of sexual assault in 2003.

Some other parishioners mentioned that Kobe Bryant and his daughter Gianna had ATTENDED MASS on that Sunday just a few hours before boarding the helicopter. They hoped that this story will encourage many admirers of Kobe Bryant to go to church regularly and TO BE READY! As Jesus told us forcefully, "No one knows the time nor the hour" when God will call us back to him. At most funerals, I mention that the loss of a loved one is also an opportunity to REFLECT on our own lives and on our own relationship with God. It is a reminder that our journey on earth is a very short one. Even if we were to live 100 years, how does this compare with ETERNITY? Our souls never die. Our brief pilgrimage on earth is to prepare them to enter into HEAVEN, TO BE WITH GOD FOR EVER AND EVER. Kobe Bryant left this world at the young age of 41. WAS HE READY TO GO?

In his now often-quoted encounter with a CATHOLIC PRIEST (go to Catholic News Agency), Kobe Bryant turned his life to God. This occurred in 2003. He was afraid of being sent to jail as he was accused of raping a woman in a Colorado hotel. He sought counsel from his priest. The priest first asked him: "Did you do it?". His answer was: NO. Second question from priest: "Do you have a good lawyer?" Bryant's answer: "Yes, a phenomenal one". Then the priest responded: "LET IT GO. Move on. GOD is not going to give you anything that you cannot handle and it is IN HIS HANDS now. This is one thing that you cannot control. LET IT GO." Bryant later said that was the TURNING POINT. HE DECIDED TO PLACE DEEPER TRUST IN GOD.

This CONVERSION, this turning toward GOD, did not mean that Kobe Bryant's life was going to be without any difficulties...While he kept winning NBA Championships (a total of 5), his marriage went through periods of turmoil and in 2011 his wife Vanessa filed for DIVORCE. Bryant decided not to give up on his marriage and he and his wife reconciled. At that time they had 2 daughters. God will then give them 2 more daughters (now 3-years old and a 6-month old).

Bryant's conversion also meant that he decided to help people, especially youth. He and his wife established a non-profit organization to assist youth with AFTER SCHOOL PROGRAMS (including basketball coaching). We can imagine the impact Bryant would have continued to have on youth in our country had God given him another 40 years.

I INVITE YOU TO REFLECT ON THIS TRAGIC ACCIDENT. We believe that whatever happens to us in our lives will always lead to something good WHEN WE LOVE GOD (Romans 8:28). This tragedy is another illustration of the paradox of the CROSS. Vanessa Bryant is carrying today a heavy cross: the loss of a husband and a 13-year old daughter, plus seven other friends also killed in the helicopter crash. May Vanessa be consoled by the outpouring of love and admiration for Kobe Bryant. May God inspire her to continue the legacy of her husband. May she get closer to God and continue to TRUST IN HIM!

What are the CROSSES that you carry today? Are you helping your own family members and close friends to carry their crosses? Do you know a couple considering separation or divorce? Can you encourage them to reconcile and understand that marriage is forever?

HEAVENLY FATHER, send your HOLY SPIRIT upon us! Help us to TRUST IN YOUR DIVINE PROVIDENCE! Help us to find YOUR LOVE in all the events of our lives! Help our unbelief! Increase our FAITH! Help us to OBEY Your Commandments. Give us HOPE! HOPE IN ETERNAL LIFE!

One in Christ,  
Fr. Alain