

The Catholic Church on Tragic Deaths by Suicide

Catholics trust in the mercy of God. This is central to our faith, and our Holy Father has taken great strides to make sure that it is preached far and wide to the faithful. What we know about suicide from a psychological perspective today, is that it is often not a free choice, but most often is a result of depression, mental illness or an emotional debility.

What does the Catholic Church consider to be a mortal sin which can destroy one's eternal relationship with God? For something to be a mortal sin, (1) the issue must be of grave matter violating a Commandment of God or a teaching of Christ and His Church, (2) a person must know it is of grave matter, and finally (3) a person must freely choose, without impediments, to commit the sin. These elements must be met for a mortal sin to have been committed. So, if a person commits suicide with these three elements, even with one missing or all present, in the mind or heart of the victim, eternal hope can still exist after suicide. With obstructing fears or interior moral impediments present, the true interior freedom of such a person's moral culpability must have been impaired to complete such a desperate act. Therefore, with moral probability, a person's action in committing suicide may not be a mortal sin upon her/his eternal soul, albeit tragic in the case of suicide.

Suffice it to say that the Catholic Church does not teach that those who commit suicide always go to hell. Rather, we entrust them to God's Divine Mercy, hoping and believing that God's Divine mercy is greater than a weakened, flawed or impeded choice made by a victim of suicide.

"Grave psychological disturbances, anguish, or grave fear of hardship, suffering, or torture can diminish the responsibility of the one committing suicide. We should not despair of the eternal salvation of persons who have taken their own lives. By ways known to Him alone, God can provide the opportunity for salutary repentance. The Church prays for persons who have taken their own lives." - For more information read, The Catechism of the Catholic Church - #2280 – 2283.

A Prayer for Victims and Survivors of Suicide

Dear Father God and Creator of all life,

In my darkness, grief, and troubling emotions from the death of my loved one, I ask for Your favor and grace, that You guard the faith I do have in You, as doubtful and weak as it may be at times. Help me to keep trusting in You even among the questions, emotions, turmoil and mysteries I face. As difficult as it may be, I entrust the eternal soul of _____ to Your Divine Mercy and eternal care. While in this life, s/he carried burdens and pains, secret or known, and found this present life difficult, may You, O God of love, mercy and life, embrace her/him now with Your compassion, where no despair or pain can find her/him, but rather where your light and love can guide and heal her/him. Forgive her/him of her/his sins. Welcome her/him into Your Kingdom, and within the Communion of Saints which surrounds us always, allow her/him to watch over me, our families and friends. I pray for myself and others who struggle in this realm of life with this painful loss and its mystery, for any who struggle to acknowledge Your goodness always, and any who may fail to experience Your love and hope that surrounds them. Grant Your forgiveness and freedom to _____. By faith in the once, forgiving and lasting anointment of Christ's life, death and resurrection in the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, grant the miracle of eternal peace, hope and comfort to my loved one, to me and our family and friends. We ask this, through Christ our Lord, who in His resurrection from the dead, and His promises to us as His disciples, was, and always will be, victorious over death. Amen.