

Suicide: I've Heard its Siren Call

For ten years now, I have suffered from chronic pain after ripping apart my abdominal wall, causing permanent nerve damage. I generally keep it private, but in the face of the mounting despair and hopelessness in our society, I feel I ought to pull back the veil.

One day I was fine, wrenching a toilet off its seal. The next, I was in terrible pain accompanied by frequent dry-heaving. While I have gotten control of the dry-heaving, I have not yet mastered the pain.

This is my life: Imagine a dagger thrust into your solar plexus. Now imagine that dagger with you at every step of life, whether it be the mundane or the joyous. Grinding, stabbing, endless pain. Now imagine what it does to your emotions and mental psyche when each day you wake knowing the pain that lies before you.

Believe me, you will long for death with such an affliction. While I never considered myself suicidal (and still don't), that doesn't mean that in the darkest of times, when I could fight the pain no longer, I didn't seriously ponder ending it all. When you feel that death is your only relief, you have entered into a perilous mental and spiritual space.

Some of us hide it better than others; some of us pull the trigger, some of us do not and will not.

Last week saw the suicides of Anthony Bourdain, Kate Spade, and countless other Americans known only to family and friends. As if to reinforce the growing despair, the CDC [released](#) a new report showing suicides are up 25 percent over

the last few decades and that suicide is now the tenth most common cause of death among Americans.

What has happened to us as a people? How is it that in this time of social, technological, and political progress Americans seem to be so miserable and without hope? Why is it that so many people who seem to have it all choose death over life?

We have been told we are living at the pinnacle moment of human development. We have been liberated from tradition, family, community, natural law, God's law, Christianity, marriage, and all of the other relics of the past. We are free to make ourselves into anything we desire, to live nearly any way we choose. Look at our technology! Look at our wealth! Look at our power!

And, yet, so many of us are filled with despair. Why?

Might it be that we are materially wealthy, but poor in spirit? Might it be that the very things we're told are holding us back from personal fulfillment are actually the very things we need in order to live a good life, to live a life at peace?

As I reflect on those most difficult times, when hope was but a pinhole of light in a wall of darkness, I find that only Faith, Love, and Duty got me through.

I am a Catholic, indeed I converted about five years into my affliction. I know the many arguments against Catholicism as I used to be quite good at attacking it, nonetheless it is the thing that most helps me make sense of our mysterious world.

One of the great gifts of the Catholic faith is how it helps one wrestle with unchosen suffering. We post-modern men are quite good at suffering when we choose it. We will suffer to

lose weight, to prep for a marathon, and so on. But we have very little tolerance for unchosen suffering, the kind that causes one to feel trapped in his own body, to feel imprisoned in a personal hell.

Through Faith, I find meaning in the suffering. I understand that I am caught up in the great drama of life and that we were never promised bliss in this life. If I were to choose a life without my pain or one with it, I do believe that I would choose the pain, despite the suffering. Through unchosen suffering and Faith, the old, prideful me has been ground to dust. Like clay in the Potter's hands, I am molded anew daily. It isn't for me to know why I am afflicted, it is for me to offer it up and allow it to make me a better person.

Yet, even with Faith, I have found myself in the darkness, crying out for relief and none came. How easy it would have been to end it all. Enter Love and Duty.

I have a beautiful wife and six incredible children. I love them with all my being. They are second only to my love of the Creator. My father died when I was a child. As such, I know how difficult it is for a single mom and fatherless children. I have a duty to live for God and for my family. When it comes to those darkest of times, it is as simple as that. My affliction, my pain, does not excuse me from my roles as husband and father. My family's love helps sustain me, and I hope that my love and sacrifice will help sustain them.

Perhaps you find yourself in the darkness or you know someone in the grips of despair. Drugs and alcohol will only drown the problem for so long and ultimately exacerbate the affliction. Same, too, for escaping into video games, music, Netflix, good food, or even work. You can never run far enough from your demons. At some point, you must confront them.

Unfortunately, our post-modern society has not given you the

tools to do so. Our times have no answers for you, which is why so many are giving up and taking their lives. To survive and thrive, you need what the world tells you to abandon. You need spiritual nourishment.

And for that, you will need to turn back to the wisdom of the past, to embrace those very things we are told to discard. Life is hard, but it is worth living when you have a sense of your place and purpose, when you have hope. Meaning is actually best found in those times of despair when everything seems meaningless – if you have the right tools and the willingness to see it.

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