

## “TEARS IN HEAVEN” GRIEVING THE HEART OF GOD

Millions have seen the poignant photograph of the Florida woman (in fact a cousin by marriage of a close friend of mine), comforting a distraught teenager, fighting back tears, her forehead clearly marked with a cross. Yes, the horrific shooting occurred on Ash Wednesday, even though I suspect that many will say it happened on Valentine’s Day. Both are true. When I saw that photo, it struck me to the core of my being. It was eerily appropriate, symbolic of just how difficult things have become in our nation. **Ash Wednesday** visibly reminds us of both our mortality and our sinfulness. Ashes are dirty, grimy, itchy and anything other than comfortable. They wreak havoc on a freshly laundered altar cloth, white albs and surplices. Like a reflex when one sneezes, I instinctively close my eyes, so accustomed am I to protecting myself from the ashes sprinkling into my eyes. They are thoroughly inconvenient, but isn’t that precisely the point? Life isn’t neat and clean– it is oftentimes messy.

While studying in Rome in 2006, I was rather surprised to discover that the Roman custom is to sprinkle the ashes on the crown of one’s head. Thus, the Ash Wednesday symbolism is much less visible, with little chance of getting in the eyes or nose, unless you are bald, I imagine! And yet, for some reason, I felt cheated. After morning Mass there was no visible sign that remained throughout the day. It didn’t seem quite right. If we are going to wear ashes, we might as well see them when we look in the mirror! The visible reminder is significant, as it recalls our **weakness and helplessness** before God. And this is precisely how millions of Americans felt; and many millions more parents felt horrified, quickly realizing that this scene could repeat itself virtually anywhere across this nation.

As we read in Genesis 6:5-6: “When the LORD saw how great the wickedness of human beings was on earth, and how every desire that their heart conceived was always nothing but evil, the LORD regretted making human beings on the earth, and **his heart was grieved.**” In the New Testament, Saint Paul reminds us in Ephesians 4:30: “And do not grieve the holy Spirit of God, with which you were sealed for the day of redemption.” How could the **Lord not be grieved** at what he sees, with such violence and murderous thoughts seething in the hearts of some of His people? Whence does it come? How does a nineteen-year-old become so disturbed as to hop in an Uber, shoot up his former school, and then stop off at a fast food joint before he was captured?

This mind-numbing helplessness characterizes the aftermath of yet another mass shooting, the latest in a high school in Parkland, FL. Approximately 24,000 live in the affluent suburb bordering the Florida Everglades. The median house value is over \$900,000. I have few answers– none in fact, that is remotely satisfactory. I surmise that the reasons why one can legally purchase a rifle at age 18 (versus 21 for a handgun) in Florida may have something to do with hunting or that rifles are more difficult to conceal than handguns. But that does not answer the question about why an AR-15 rifle falls under that category, when it does not seem to be used for hunting. The AR-15 was designed in 1957 at the behest of the U.S. Army, which asked ArmaLite to come up with a high-velocity rifle, full and semi-automatic fire, 20-shot magazine, able to penetrate a standard Army helmet at 500 meters. The AR-15 is the civilian version of the military M-16.

Again, I readily admit that I am totally out of my league here, and yet I would like to think that I have common sense. Does a hunter need a semi-automatic rifle? If he does, doesn’t that mean he’s a pretty lousy shot? Might something finally emerge from this tragedy in the way of positive steps towards addressing mental health concerns? HIPAA laws (Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996) intersect at some point with disclosures to National Instant Criminal Background Check System (NICS). In January 2016, by executive order of President Obama, some changes were made, establishing a very narrow list of exceptions that allowed Covered Entities (i.e. health plans or health care providers) to disclose personal health information to the NICS. When I write narrow, I mean it. For example, those “involuntarily committed to a mental institution” or found not guilty of a crime “by reason of insanity” would constitute two such exceptions. Neither was the case in Florida last week, and it is evident that warnings were not heeded properly.

Where does one draw the line about the sharing of private information? It is the delicate balancing act between health privacy and public interest. It appears that enhanced background checks and a ban on “bump stocks”

may finally on the table to be considered by Congress and enacted into law by the President. These are positive and necessary steps. Still, I have little doubt that God is grieved by these horrific acts and if we but heed His voice, the message of the Gospel impels us to create a society in which all feel valued, safe and under the protective and loving arms of the Father.

- I enlist your support one last time this winter to alleviate the costs of heating the Cathedral. The December bill alone was well over \$12,000. Your assistance really takes the sting out of opening that bill each month. Envelopes are available in the pews.
- I'll admit my mistake with a caveat. Just after someone complimented our bulletin for its lack of typos, I noticed one of my own! If the federal holiday celebrated last Monday honored several US presidents, it should be Presidents' Day, not President's Day as I wrote. However, **technically speaking** the federal holiday is named "George Washington's Birthday," in honor of a singular president!
- We celebrated a funeral Mass for **Dr. Don Briel**, former Director of the Catholic Studies Program at the University of St. Thomas. He joined the Cathedral parish a year ago and possessed a penetrating intellect and deep faith. He truly believed that the search for truth, beauty and goodness was a pursuit in which everyone could participate. He formed more than a generation of young college students, many of whom now teach in our Catholic elementary schools and high schools and even at the college level. May he rest in peace.
- Las Vegas is not impressed with the 2018 Twins, setting at 82 ½ games the over-under. In other words, they think they will be positively mediocre. Let's see how Spring training goes, and if they land another starting pitcher before the start of the season.
- Creatures of habit...After careful, painstaking automotive research carried out over the course of a month, reading dozens of reviews, and searching the inventory of every dealer within a 100 mile radius, I finally made my choice. I settled on the same make and model that I purchased in 2004! Okay, if not creative, at least I am consistent! The folks at Roseville Ford were simply wonderful to work with and they made my final selection an easy one!

Sincerely in Christ,

Fr. John L. Ubel,  
Rector