

Assisting Catholics Families in the Face of Suicide

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* teaches, Everyone is responsible for his life before God who has given it to him. It is God who remains the sovereign Master of life. We are obliged to accept life gratefully and preserve it for his honor and the salvation of our souls. We are stewards, not owners, of the life God has entrusted to us. It is not ours to dispose of (#2280). The Catechism later teaches, 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 (#2282-2283).

Canon law no longer specifically mentions suicide as an impediment to funeral rites or religious sepulture. In most cases, the progress made in the study of the underlying causes of self-destruction shows that the vast majority are consequences of an accumulation of psychological factors that impede making a free and deliberative act of the will. Thus the general tendency is to see this extreme gesture as almost always resulting from the effects of an imbalanced mental state and, as a consequence, it is no longer forbidden to hold a funeral rite for a person who has committed this gesture. **Canon 1184**

It is recognized that those who die from the act of suicide deserve understanding and compassion. The deceased may have been suffering from a serious psychological instability, or overwhelming fear and confusion. Therefore, the church offers funeral and burial rites for those who may have died as a result of suicide. If you look in the Roman Ritual, *Order of Christian Funerals*, you will find two prayers for those who die by suicide in the section “Prayers and Texts in Particular Circumstances.” These prayers evoke forgiveness for the departed and consolation to their family.