

**When soldiers die in battle, the manner of their death almost sanctifies their entire life. We honor those who believed so strongly in our country that they gave everything they owned, even their own life, for the sake of others.**

**Because death is so final, we let the way someone dies interpret the meaning of their life. Some people die a noble death: soldiers have died for their country; mothers have died giving birth; firefighters have died making rescues. All are treated as heroes, no matter the past sins of their life. By contrast, some deaths seem pointless. A teenager speeds and crashes a car; a patient dies unexpectedly in a routine operation; an individual with intense emotional struggles takes his or her own life. When these things happen, we don't want the manner of death to interpret that person's life. There was more to their lives than the senselessness of their deaths.**

**This is especially true with suicide, when one person's irrational act causes immense sorrow for the people left behind. If someone you know takes their own life, you may find yourself wondering if you had done enough to prevent it; you may want to share the guilt. You may also wonder if that person can be redeemed because suicide is sinful. We may be tempted to accept responsibility for someone else's actions, but a person bent on taking their own life can probably do it no matter what we say or do. If anyone ever threatens suicide, we should take it seriously and marshal support to keep it from happening. Our church believes our life comes from God; it's not ours to dispose of. Still, we believe that the causes of suicide include grave psychological disturbances, anguish, or grave fear of hardship, suffering or torture. People who take their own lives are not always in their right mind. We believe that even after death, God may still provide an opportunity for repentance.**

**When struggles come, it is best to deal with them directly, not to run from them in ways that harm ourselves and others. A proper perspective is the one Paul gives the Philippians. "I have accepted the loss of all things that I may gain Christ and be found in him. . . . Forgetting what lies behind but straining forward to what lies ahead, I continue my pursuit toward the goal, the prize of God's upward calling, in Christ Jesus." All the adversities of life do not separate Paul from Christ. He doesn't need things. He leaves everything behind and races toward the finish line to attain first prize, life in Christ. The misfortunes of life can actually propel us onwards and make us better people.**

**Next week we will commemorate the death of Jesus. He is another example of someone whose life is interpreted by the manner of his death. He gave everything he had for the sake of the gospel. He lived without possessions and he endured abuse from his enemies. We may not determine exactly how we will die, but we can determine how we will live. If we are faithful in life, we will be faithful in death, and our death will**

favorably interpret the meaning of our life to our family, our friends, and God above.

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When struggles come, it is best to deal with them directly, not to run from them in ways that harm ourselves and others. A proper perspective is the one Paul gives the Romans: "You are in the spirit if only the Spirit of God dwells in you. . . . If the Spirit dwells in you, the one who raised Christ from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also, through his Spirit dwelling in you." During Lent we ask God for a spirit transplant: to remove whatever bad spirit tempts us to sin and despair, and to replace it with the Holy Spirit, who leads us to life. We pray this explicitly in the scrutiny today for the elect.

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