

Submission for Space for Reflection in 4-23 issue

Reflections on a tragedy

One week ago, horror and tragedy struck Virginia Tech. Students and faculty, going about the ordinary campus life of res halls and classrooms, faced the unspeakable. Family and friends received word of the unimaginable. And the depth of grief felt by so many was unutterable.

Sitting in Rosenthal last Tuesday, having seen a lot of news coverage of the massacre, I thought of the following verse from the Book of Malachi: "Have we not all one father? Hath not one God created us? Why do we deal treacherously every man against his brother?" We cannot explain the senseless and irrational. But can we help in this situation? I believe we can.

At a time of personal tragedy in my own life, I felt the tangible spiritual support of my friends and family. By that I mean, beyond hearing their words of support, I felt moments of being physically and mentally upheld and sustained. The feeling to me was of a spiritual force, something outside ordinary sensation; and I attributed it to the prayers and best wishes of those who loved me and were thinking of me. This memory gives me hope that when people say to those at Virginia Tech, and to the families of the victims, "Our thoughts and prayers are with you," this is not just an empty cliché but a message that can indeed make a difference, however modest, in the face of so much suffering.

There will be a lot of investigation growing out of this incident. Investigation of how Virginia Tech and law enforcement handled this student and the events of last Monday morning. Other universities will no doubt review emergency plans and research ways to increase campus security.

As a graduate student here at NSU, I was pleased to see how quickly Student Counseling put out a message about what to do if afraid and about support resources for students. As the G.A. for Multicultural and Spiritual Affairs, I was grateful for the suggestion of the Interim Director of Student Activities and Leadership Development, Terry Morrow, that we create a message board in the Spiritual Life Lounge for the NSU community to write messages of condolences and support to the Virginia Tech community. I was glad to learn of the Friday vigil at the Flight Deck. We are a university community; we can imagine in some small degree what impact this violent crime is having on the Virginia Tech campus.

For me, there is an important reminder that comes out of this tragedy—beyond the need for security plans and student counseling, as essential as those are. It is the reminder we learned after 9-11 also. It is the life lesson I learned in my own personal tragedy: Our loved ones are the single most important part of our lives. The final phone calls of those in the World Trade Center and in the planes on 9-11 were simple messages of love. The parents of the students killed at Virginia Tech grieve that they had no chance to say good-bye and tell their children one last time of their love.

Yes, school is important. Yes, jobs are important. But in a time of emergency, it is our love for our family members and friends that matters most of all. Let's remember to tell them and show them our love during the blessedly normal, uneventful days of our lives.

“The eternal God is thy refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms: and he shall thrust out the enemy from before thee.” Deuteronomy 33:27

“Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted.” Matthew 5:4

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