

Family, friends say farewell to New Jersey shooting victim

FLEMINGTON, N.J. – Hundreds of friends, classmates and family members filled St. Magdalen de Pazzi Church in Flemington for the April 24 funeral Mass for Michael Steven Pohle Jr., one of 32 victims of a student gunman who went on a shooting rampage April 16 at Virginia Tech in Blacksburg, Va.

The Mass was celebrated by Father Timothy Christy, pastor of St. Magdalen and Bishop Paul G. Bootkoski of Metuchen. Acting New Jersey Gov. Richard Codey attended the Mass.

In his homily, Father Christy said that in the wake of such a tragedy it is difficult to find the words to express how one is feeling, but that the Gospel can provide guidance.

“The word of God is the only sensible and cohesive and logical way to be able to turn to some kind of understanding,” Father Christy said. “The word of God speaks to us when our words fail.”

The priest noted that as Jesus died on the cross “darkness fell over the whole land, symbolic of the darkness that settles over any one of us in a time of tragedy.”

“But that wasn’t the end of the tragedy,” he continued, referring to Christ’s resurrection. “Something had happened, something miraculous, something unimaginable had taken place. The one who was dead was alive.”

Father Christy said that even though Pohle is no longer alive he is still able to touch the lives of many who knew him and others who are only now hearing his story. “Even now, God is at work in the life of Michael,” Father Christy said. “Look at how many people have been touched.”

The pastor said his parents, Michael and Theresa Pohle, have been faithful parishioners of St. Magdalen de Pazzi and he remembered their son as a kind and fun-loving person who enjoyed helping others and putting their needs above his own.

“He didn’t get through his life by trying to be No. 1,” said Father Christy. “In fact, his instinct was to try to lift up No. 2 and No. 3.”

“God’s grace and God’s love, from his baptism to his confirmation, was at work in his good instinct to look out for the needs of somebody else,” he said.

The priest said Pohle’s dedication to helping others was evident in the final moments of his life. Even after he was shot, he attempted to block a door so that others could escape through a window without being harmed.

Pohle, who was born Oct. 15, 1983, was a graduate of Hunterdon Central Regional High School in Flemington and was scheduled to graduate from Virginia Tech in May with a bachelor’s degree in biology. He played varsity football and lacrosse at Hunterdon Central and was a member of the lacrosse club at Virginia Tech. Pohle’s college teammates traveled to New Jersey to attend the funeral.

Besides his parents, he is survived by his sister, Nicole, and his brother, Sean. The family is from Raritan Township.

The Pohle family released a statement thanking all of those who have shown their support since their son’s death and sending their condolences to the other families grieving the loss of their loved ones.

“We are so proud of, and honored by, what our son brought to the world in such a short time,” the family said. “We will always love him, and will never forget him, as he begins this next phase of his journey to fulfill his dreams.”