

‘You are precious; I love you’

The suicides in June by fashion designer Kate Spade and travel journalist Anthony Bourdain just two days later shocked many.

When people as successful as such celebrities kill themselves, it may prompt others who are depressed to consider the same, because these people seemed to have so much going for them, and still faced this illness.

Fortunately, it also often leads people to turn to help. CNN reported that trained counselors at more than 150 crisis centers in the United States fielded 65 percent more phone calls than usual for the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline in the week after Spade’s death.

The website reportingonsuicide.org notes, “Suicide is complex. There are almost always multiple causes, including psychiatric illnesses that may not have been recognized or treated. However, these illnesses are treatable.”

The site also notes that mental disorders and/or substance abuse have been found in 90 percent of people who have died by suicide.

We cannot simply say, “Have a nice day,” to someone who is clinically depressed, and expect that to change his or her situation. But we can learn to identify warning signs (see box) and get help for those who are hurting.

Some of the people around us may not ever have heard the message that God loves them, and that they are uniquely and wonderfully made. It’s our job as Catholic Christians to remind them of that love. As the Lord says in the Old Testament, “Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name: you are mine. ... Because you are precious in my eyes and honored, and I love you” (Is 43:1,4).

It is somewhat ironic that people generally express dismay and concern over the death by suicide of a celebrity, while a number of groups and individuals support physician-assisted suicide and advocate for its ready availability.

They may contend the difference is that those seeking physician-assisted suicide are terminally ill and in pain and should have this choice. However, the same mental conditions are at play in both cases: People who are hurting and in mental anguish over their situation seek a final and permanent solution to their problems.

Rather than facilitating death we ought to lift up life.

We must tell our friends and family and others we encounter that God loves them, no matter what their situation is. Especially for those who have mental illness or who seek fulfillment or release from pain through drugs and alcohol, we must be the heart and hands of Christ.

Warning signs

Some warning signs may help you determine if a loved one is at risk for suicide, especially if the behavior is new, has increased or seems related to a painful event, loss or change. If you or someone you know exhibits any of these, seek help by calling the Lifeline at 800-273-8255 or visit suicidepreventionlifeline.org.

- Talking about wanting to die or to kill themselves
- Looking for a way to kill themselves, such as searching online or buying a gun
- Talking about feeling hopeless or having no reason to live
- Talking about feeling trapped or in unbearable pain
- Talking about being a burden to others
- Increasing the use of alcohol or drugs
- Acting anxious or agitated; behaving recklessly

- Sleeping too little or too much
- Withdrawing or isolating themselves
- Showing rage or talking about seeking revenge
- Extreme mood swings