

The Theme Song from M*A*S*H

Many fans of the show M*A*S*H do not know that the theme song written by Johnny Mandel and Mike Altman, *Suicide is Painless*, had these lyrics:

Through early morning fog I see
Visions of the things to be
The pains that are withheld for me
I realize and I can see
(R) That suicide is painless
It brings on many changes
And I can take or leave it if I please
The game of life is hard to play
I'm gonna lose it anyway
The losing card I'll someday lay
So this is all I have to say ...
And you can do the same thing if you please

To the person contemplating suicide, it is painless. It is the end of their pain. They do not see the pain they are going to cause, suicide is a selfish act. It is their decision alone.

Every day members of families, people we know or work with contemplate a permanent solution to a temporary problem. It is interesting in Robin William's last movie he used that line as a response to a person who contemplates suicide. They have reached a point where logic and emotion both agree that the world would be a better place without them. It is difficult to understand how they could arrive at their decision. Others looking can see all the hopeful options for them, but they cannot. It is like they took a trip to the moon all by themselves. They have seen earth from a different perspective. When they try to explain it, it doesn't make sense to the earth bound people. But they feel they see things with a new clarity and no one else will understand.

As the new perspective is being developed, they withdraw from other people because they don't understand. They withdraw from hobbies and activities that they used to like because they are not part of their new view. They may start giving things away because they won't need them any more. Work is not important because it does not give them meaning to their lives anymore nor does it accomplish anything for them. So their work or studies diminishes in quality or quantity. Since the problem that is causing the issue is so painful, they may try to self med-

icate through drugs or alcohol.

For some there may not be any of these steps. For some, the decision to commit suicide is spontaneously arrived at on the spur of the moment. For others it is a long thought-out process so that changes in personality are missed over a long period of time.

What would Jesus do when confronted with this person? He never started a conversation with a sinner with the statement "you are going to go to Hell". He started with love in His voice and asked questions as in Luke 12. We can ask people, if their problems are weighing them down. Sometimes, by helping them find a way out of their situation, they discover for themselves that suicide is not the answer.

You can ask point blank, if they are thinking of killing themselves. Asking the question will not put the thought in their head or encourage them to act upon it.

Do not think that if all of a sudden their spirits are brighter once the situation is over. The "over" part of it may be that they have put their plan into operation and are fully committed to act upon it. This happiness and peace is going to end with a tragic event that will take everyone by surprise.

Suicides can come in groups or can run in families. This is why schools have programs when one student commits suicide or helps students when a family member takes their life. One suicide is as the song invites, "And you can do the same thing if you please."

The most important thing to share is that the person is loved and has a future. They need something to hope in and a reason to keep going. A young wife and mother found her husband in the living room with a gun in his hand. She knew they had financial problems and when her husband said that he was doing it for her and the children because they would get his insurance. She asked her husband, how was he going to tell their children it was not their fault. She told him his action would say to her and their families that she was a bad wife. She redirected his thinking. Then she invited him to get help. He agreed and now six years later he is still with us. The major change is his life is that now he volunteers on a suicide help line. Did the financial problems go away? No—he went into bankruptcy. But he knows he has a wife who will stand with him and together they can handle the problem.

Fr Jonathan Morse