

# There are some things you can't un-see

## More than you might suspect... and that's OK

Over the last several days a number of our officers have reminded me about a basic life axiom: *Be careful what you look at because there are things you can't un-see.* This truth calls to mind, most immediately, the experience of our harbor patrol pulling human remains from last week's crash wreckage in the Potomac. In inky darkness our divers and those of other agencies explored the river bottom removing to the surface the bodies and fragments they found of our fellow citizens. The axiom calls to mind the medical examiners, coroners and patrolmen standing guard not only over the safety of the situation, but also over the inalienable dignity of those we lost. And perhaps, therein lies the struggle: competing visions, vying for peace of mind.

If officers and other personnel saw only the death and destruction of this (or any) tragic event, that would, in some ways, be simple. Death, sadness, matte darkness. It wouldn't be comfortable, but it would be, "all." But that's not all we've seen. We've also seen the beauty of life and happiness. What better captures that than the loss of the many figure skaters on board the plane, icons of grace and vitality? We've also seen our own lives, children, spouses, loved ones ..and in them parallels with those we saw die that night: there again tension. So, perhaps oddly, the present pain comes from -yes- seeing the darkness and death, but it is magnified, made relatively worse in conjunction with other good things we've seen in this life. Thanks be to God, even this is not *all* that we have seen.

Yes we've seen worldly death. Yes we've seen worldly good. Neither of these can be un-seen. Juxtaposed with each other painful questions and comparisons arise. But we have also seen the absolute light of God. Whatever our religious background, folks generally agree that God is "that than which nothing is greater." Whether we conceive of God as a cosmic reality, ruler of a pantheon of lesser deities, a personal God, or simply as 'being,' we acknowledge God and even just the concept of godliness as: (a) dwarfing all else, and (b) absolute goodness, greatness, simply "absolute." Once you've seen that, you can't unsee it. And the thing about "the absolute," is that it blots out all else. It drives out all darkness... it brings life and only life... and by extension healing.

Some suggestions then for moving forward:

1. Do not deny the darkness you've seen. To do so is unreal, fantasy... and we do not live in fantasy.
2. Acknowledge the pain you're feeling yes... but also the fact that the pain is *in-relation-to* the earthly good you have experienced in your life... and the goodness cannot be taken away. It's there, it's real... we've seen it and we cannot un-see it.
3. For a while anyway, spend some extra time staring at, contemplating God, the absolute, so that the light that drives out all darkness can bring healing to our present pain.

The above reflection can be approached by people from any background and is based on metaphysics and personal witness. For those who wish to consult Christian Scripture on the same topics, I recommend reflecting on the following from II Corinthians 4:

*"We do not lose heart, because our body is being renewed each day even though our body is being destroyed at the same time. The present burden of our trial is light enough, and earns for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison. We do not fix our gaze on what is seen, but on what is unseen. What is seen is transitory, what is unseen lasts forever."*

