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I returned to the Catholic Church in 2010, believing that it was the beginning of my life's "happily ever after." Then my son died by suicide in March 2017.

I first entered the church when I was baptized as a baby. I was raised in Texas by my single mother; I never met my father. As a child, I was sexually abused; and during my teenage years, my trauma was compounded by religious themes I had internalized in my Hispanic American household. Sex before marriage, I was told often, was sinful; and to the mind of a young survivor, this meant I was not good enough for God. I walked away from my faith and would not return for more than 20 years.

Years later, I fell in love with a Catholic man, and began taking RCIA classes in 2009. I expected to take the classes and get the rest of my sacraments with no intention of truly returning to the church — until I met a man named Noe Rocha, who helped me to understand that God loved me, no matter what trauma I experienced. Noe helped me to strengthen my relationship to and understanding of the Eucharist.

I began to engage with church doctrine and to grapple with the church's theology of suffering. I sat with the words of St. Augustine, "You called and cried out loud and shattered my deafness. You were radiant and resplendent, you put to flight my blindness." I understood that, while my life had not always been a joyful one, even amid those moments of desolation, God loved me; God walked with me.

Were it not for my return to the church, I would not have survived my son's suicide.

My son Anthony was born when I was 17 years old. I loved him from the first moment I saw him. He was responsible, kind and fun. He loved skateboarding and mustangs. When I returned to the church, Anthony was 16 years old. He understood church teaching and the tenets of our faith, yet when he was 20, he told me he was an atheist. I panicked and argued with him often, attempting to change his mind.

On the morning of his suicide Anthony sat in my room and told me that everything I had taught him about Catholicism was true, and that he wanted to come back to the church. To this day I do not know if that was him saying that so I would not worry about him because he knew what he was planning or if he truly believed it, but I have chosen to believe that God was at work within my son, especially during his final, painful moments.

I did not choose joy after losing Anthony to suicide. I chose grief. I chose to feel my loss. To cry and to refuse to numb my pain with clichés or the idea that Anthony was in a "better place." I turned to the teachings of the church on death, judgment, and heaven and hell. I chose to pray for my son's soul.

So I mourned.

In the darkness of my mourning, like other tragic moments I had experienced throughout my life, I knew that God was mourning with me. As much as I love Anthony, I know that God loves him more. I do not have to convince God that Anthony is a good boy despite his suicide. I also do not worry that God has damned my son's soul, as many in our church believe. I believe he can save not just Anthony, but me as well.

I also was blessed to have great priests who showed up for me and my family from the moment we found Anthony's body. I have a dream team of priests, and each of them is available to me in different ways, but all of them have helped me to process this loss. I hope more and more priests learn how to show up for people in the ways in which my priests have shown up for me.

Even in the grief and sadness that I will live with for the rest of my life, God has opened my eyes to the moments of joy in my life: the laughter of my grandchildren, my husband and I paying off debt, and our home, including the garage where Anthony died. Since his death, this space is one dedicated to singing, joy and love.

What I hope people understand from my story is the ways that the Catholic Church can help support families who have lost a loved one to suicide. We have the theology of suffering that is rooted in love, truth and reality. I do not understand how I can have any moments of joy after my son took his own life, but I do. I do not understand how they can happen in the space where he died, but they do.

I chose to be Catholic and pray for Anthony's soul and for my own.

In his goodness, God gives me the joy and strength to heal, survive and to love.

[Leticia Ochoa Adams lives in Texas with her kids, grandkids and pitbulls. She writes and speaks on grief, faith, suicide loss and motherhood. You can find more on her website LeticiaOAdams.com.]

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