News



Parishioners pray and grieve at St. Patrick's Church, in Sydney's Bondi neighborhood, in the wake of the horrific knife attack at Bondi Junction on April 13, 2024. (OSV News photo/Patrick Lee, The Catholic Weekly).

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The joy of Eastertide has turned to shock and bewilderment across Sydney's Catholic community in the wake of a deadly knife attack at Bondi Junction Westfield shopping center April 13, in which seven people were killed and a dozen injured, including a nine-month-old baby.

Archbishop Anthony Fisher of Sydney joined fellow Australians in mourning the victims, in remarks made at Mass at St. Mary's Cathedral on April 14, the day after the attack, which was by coincidence the Day of the Unborn Child, one of Sydney's biggest pro-life commemorations.

"At a time of universal grief and horror at the multiple murders and injuries at Bondi Junction yesterday, including the stabbing of a baby — as well as celebration of the courage of the baby's mother, the policewoman, and other bystanders — we reflect upon our community's profound commitment to the value of every human life," Fisher said, as reported by The Catholic Weekly.

"In this Mass we recommit ourselves and our community to that principle, even as we pray for eternal life for yesterday's victims," he said.

"We acknowledge that all human life is made in the image of God, made for a full life on earth and eternal life in heaven, and so demands our reverence and protection, especially when most vulnerable."

Masses and prayers were offered across Sydney for the victims, with the Bondi Parish of St. Patrick's and St. Anne's offering three Masses for its grieving community.

At least two parishioners knew 38-year-old osteopath Ashlee Good — the mother of the nine-month-old baby currently recovering from the attack at Sydney Children's Hospital.

Despite the best attempts of bystanders and doctors to save her life, Good died from her wounds at St. Vincent's Hospital, after pushing her baby into the arms of strangers.

Several members of the congregation at St. Patrick's Church in Bondi wept as visiting priest Father Ninian Doohan offered words of comfort in his homily at the morning Mass April 14.

Around 60 — many of them from Bondi parish's thriving community of young adults — remained to pray the rosary and comfort each other immediately afterwards.

Doohan was likewise among those on the scene shortly after the attack, emerging from Bondi Junction train station minutes after the chaos had taken place.

A delay in catching public transport to go shopping meant he missed the events by less than 15 minutes, arriving to see a large crowd and emergency response presence.

The priest blessed the ambulances and emergency crews as they were departing, adding in his homily that he "did under-estimate the danger even with the police presence there."

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While he felt "totally inadequate to the task" of pastoral support in the face of such horror, Doohan urged the congregation to reach out for support and offered to be available to anyone who wished a pastoral visit.

"The only thing that sounds clear in my mind is that God put me in the close proximity of horror and tragedy so that therefore I can be ... one with you, and with them, and not an outsider to it," he said.

"I ask that we would all be prepared to ask God for forgiveness and also be prepared to give forgiveness and to participate in his mercy," he added.

"That challenge to live in and with and through his compassion, even when it is beyond our comprehension and even when injustices have been committed against us."

The priest from Edinburgh, Scotland, had only been in the parish a week as a replacement for parish priest Father Anthony Robbie, who was on holiday.

Francis sent a telegram to Fisher soon after the knife attack, expressing his "spiritual closeness" with Sydney.

"Pope Francis was deeply saddened to learn of the violent attack in Sydney, and he sends the assurance of his spiritual closeness to all affected by this senseless tragedy, especially those who are now mourning the loss of a loved one," Cardinal Pietro Parolin, Vatican secretary of state, said in a telegram on April 13.

"He likewise offers his prayers for the dead, the injured, as well as the first responders, and invokes upon the nation the divine blessings of consolation and strength."

Police identified the attacker, who was shot and killed by New South Wales Police inspector Amy Scott, as 40-year-old Queensland man Joel Cauchi.

The police officer entered the Bondi Junction shopping center alone after being guided to the scene by bystanders.

According to reports in The Weekend Australian, Cauchi was known to police for mental health issues, and had previously advertised his services as a male escort.

The dean of St. Mary's Cathedral, Father Don Richardson, also posted a call for prayers on social media for all affected by the tragedy.

"Many people who come to St. Mary's Cathedral for Mass or other prayers live in that area and the mall at Bondi Junction is a place they know well," he wrote.

"Holy Cross Catholic Church is just down the street from the Bondi Junction Westfield. May its tall spire and cross be a beacon of hope to all the people affected by this tragedy," he said.

"Let us all remember in our prayers the souls of those who have died," Richardson added, "and pray too for those who have been wounded, their families and friends, the police, emergency paramedics, the staff and all who witnessed those traumatic scenes on what should have been a beautiful Saturday afternoon."