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The Politicization of Tragedy

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Distinctly Catholic

The politicization of a tragedy is as predictable as it is unseemly. The tragedy is that Sister Denise Mosier was killed in a car crash caused by a drunk driver, Carlos Martinelly-Montano, who was in the country illegally and was facing deportation for earlier drunk driving charges. Two other sisters remain in the hospital. The event is fraught with just the kind of emotional content that appeals to the hate-mongers in our culture.

A Republican member of Congress, Harold Rogers, told the *Washington Times*: "Now we see the tragic results this 'virtual amnesty' policy of the Obama administration has caused. A life could have been saved had ICE [Immigration and Customs Enforcement] just simply done their job to begin with." But, of course, ICE can't do its job because of the enormous backlog of deportation cases and the Obama Administration, like the Bush Administration before it, has chosen to focus its efforts on processing the most serious criminals. We can have the debate about whether or not drunk driving should be treated as a more serious crime, but until we have comprehensive immigration reform, the ICE will continue to face a backlog.

The nuns, unsurprisingly, were having none of this. "The Benedictine Sisters are dismayed and saddened that this tragedy has been politicized and become an apparent forum for the illegal immigration agenda. While grieving and dealing with the death and severe injuries of our sisters, we would like to re-focus attention on the consequences of drinking and driving and on Christ's command to forgive." And the parents of the young man responsible went to the convent to beg forgiveness for their son, forgiveness that was readily given.

The reaction of the nuns brought to mind the shooting of a group of Amish children a few years back. The families in the community made food for the families afflicted by the killing spree, and they also prepared food for the family of the shooter. I remember thinking then, as I thought this morning reading about the Benedictine sisters, "I try to be a Christian but I have a long, long way to go." Yet, who can deny that this

is the very essence of our faith, the power to forgive, the most awesome power in the world because it transcends the world. It is not "normal" to forgive so readily; the typical human instinct is to rage and revenge. But, the words of the Savior from the Cross, "Forgive them, Father, for they know not what they do," are unambiguous words. Those words have struck deeply into the hearts of the Benedictine sisters who had just lost one of their own. Those words struck deeply into the hearts of the Amish families who had just lost their children. Do they strike us so deeply?

The impulse to politicize a tragedy is worse than the impulse to revenge. Acknowledging one's anger, which always masks a deeper emotion such as grief, may be a necessary step towards healing and forgiveness. But turning one's grief into a political slogan does nothing to assuage one's grief. And turning someone else's grief into a slogan is barbaric, whether that slogan be anti-immigrant or pro-gun control or anti-drunk driving. Let the sisters come to terms with their grief. Let them bury their beloved Sister Denise. Congressman Rogers and the others who are turning this tragedy into a political campaign mantra should be ashamed of themselves. "The fact the he had DUIs is really poignant, but he's a child of God and deserves to be treated with dignity," said Sister Glenna Smith of the young man who had just killed her fellow Benedictine. It is a shame that Congressman Rogers cannot act with greater dignity as well. I am sure the good sisters will be praying for him too.

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