

THE PLACE OF SUICIDE IS HOLY GROUND

Where a person dies is a sacred place because it is where a hurting soul found peace and freedom from the pain of mental illness. It is a holy place because the person who died there was engulfed by God there and is now no longer suffering. Those who are grieving often find comfort in a blessing of the place with a special ritual or service that includes scripture reading and opportunities for loved ones to share favorite stories and memories of the person who has died.

I have developed a ritual to bless such places. I have been in garages, bedrooms, basements, and other parts of a house to bless and remind survivors that this place is sacred. It is not a spooky or scary place but a place that should be honored because God embraced a suffering loved one there.

After loved ones of the person who died have had time to gather and share stories, begin the blessing service by recalling that we are on holy ground and in the presence of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. I usually read the story about Zacchaeus from Luke 19:1–10. The important sentence is when Jesus declares that “today salvation has come to this house.”

A reading from the Gospel of Luke

Jesus entered Jericho and was passing through. A man was there by the name of Zacchaeus; he was a chief tax collector and was wealthy. He wanted to see who Jesus was, but being a short man, he could not, because of the crowd. So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore-fig tree to see him, since Jesus was coming that way.

When Jesus reached the spot, he looked up and said to him, “Zacchaeus, come down immediately. I must stay at your house today.” So he came down at once and welcomed him gladly. All the people saw this and began to mutter, “He has gone to be the guest of a sinner.” But Zacchaeus stood up and said to the Lord, “Look, Lord! Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount.”

Jesus said to him, “Today salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost.”

I then offer a spontaneous prayer for their loved one and for the survivors and then solemnly sprinkle the spot where the person died with holy water. As a final blessing, I make the Sign of the Cross over the spot where the person died and conclude with prayer:

Eternal rest grant unto her (him), O Lord,
and let perpetual light shine upon her (him).

May she (he) rest in peace.

Amen.

May her (his) soul and the souls of all the faithful departed,
through the mercy of God, rest in peace.

Amen.

Invite additional comments or storytelling, especially if those gathered seemed hesitant at the beginning.