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Mourners encouraged to emulate faith and kindness of Gonzaga's Dominik Pettey

By Kaitlyn McGrath, Special to the Standard

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Thousands of people packed the Upper Church of the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception on Nov. 8 to mourn the loss of Dominik Pettey, the Gonzaga College High School senior who was killed in a car crash on Nov. 1. He and four other students were in a disabled car on the side of the road when another car hit their vehicle, killing Pettey and injuring the other passengers.

Groups of congregants dressed in black, comprised mostly of young people, made their way up the steps to the basilica to pray and to sign the guest books, which at half-hour before the Funeral Mass had to be temporarily removed because the line extended out the main entrance and down the steps to the ground level of the shrine.

It was standing-room-only at the sides and back of the church as Father Mark Knestout, pastor at the Pettey family's parish, St. Bartholomew in Bethesda, processed into Mass along with more than 20 priests from throughout the archdiocese.

During the homily, Father Knestout focused on the topic of suffering, a relevant subject to the congregation and to Pettey during his life when he underwent appendix surgery last year.

"The world says to us that our suffering is proof that God doesn't exist," Father Knestout said. "As Christians, we believe that no suffering is ultimately meaningless or pointless. Our suffering brings us closer to Him, to the one who suffered ultimately for all of us, our Lord and savior Jesus Christ."

Father Knestout recalled that when Pettey first started getting sick from appendicitis, the first call he made was to a priest to hear his Confession. His faith continued to grow and mature during his own suffering, and he developed a devotion to the Divine Mercy in which, according to his mother, he would carry the image of the Sacred Heart in his pocket that he would kiss before he left the house for the day and again when he returned home, he said.

"Dom knew his faith; it was part of his very being," Father Knestout said. "He practiced it, and it was foundational to why you love him, why you are here. It gave him his humility. It gave him his compassion. It gave him his joy. It gave him his happiness. ... If you want answers, if you are looking for whys, then see the goodness that was Dominik and use that as your motivator in your own life."

Father Knestout also discussed the significance of Pettey's death taking place on All Saints Day. Additionally, in the Dominican liturgical calendar, the funeral Mass took place on its feast of All Souls. As a tribute to Pettey's namesake, the Dominican House of Studies in Washington, D.C., gave the Pettey family a relic of St. Dominic to put on the altar during the Mass.

"We give praise to the gift of life and the gift of suffering that was Dominik in our lives," Father Knestout said. "We pray for his soul and all souls, and we prepare ourselves to use the suffering in our lives, the pain we have in our lives, to bring it to God, to motivate us to make us closer to who He is in everything that we do, whether it's on the ball field, or the rink, or in the classroom, or in church or just hanging with our friends."

After the Mass, a statement from Pettey's parents, Patrick and Magdalena, was read by his uncle, Matthew Konieczny, in which they expressed their sorrow but also their confidence in the knowledge that "God would not have taken Dominik from this earth at the pinnacle of his life unless he had a mission for him."

"If we as parents could ask to honor him just one more way, it would be to carry on the message of Divine Mercy," the statement continued, asking that participants to take Pettey's memorial card, which had the image and prayer of Divine Mercy on it. The Mass began with a recitation of the Rosary and the Divine Mercy chaplet, and a large image of the Divine Mercy was placed at the foot of the altar during the Mass as well.

"On our son's behalf, spread the message of Divine Mercy and practice active mercy and kindness toward one another," the parents asked. "Share with the world that we have an all-merciful God and that no sin is too great that it cannot be forgiven. It doesn't stop here. Let the love you feel for celebrating Dominik's life continue to inspire you to seek love and trust in God, to fill that place in your heart, like Dominik did. Let us all gift for heaven."

In addition to his parents, Dominik Pettey, 17, is survived by his brother Nicholas and sister Veronika, by his grandparents Peter and Marianna Konieczny, and by many aunts, uncles and cousins.



Dominik Pettey

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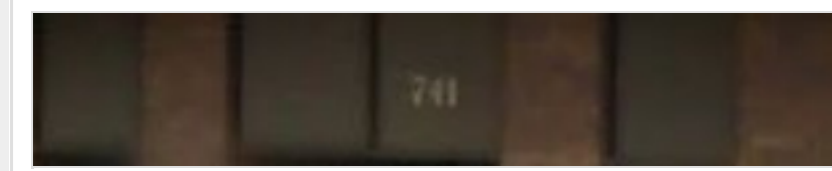
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