

Toggle navigation

Search Patheos

-
-
- [Beliefs](#)
- [Topics](#)
- [Columnists](#)
- [Religion Library](#)
- [newsletters](#)
- [More](#)



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- [Guidelines for comments](#)
- [Links I Love](#)
- [Magnificent Bloggery](#)
- [FAQ About Deacons](#)
- [Archives](#)

[Catholic](#)

The short life and tragic death of Fr. Kevin Kayda

October 12, 2013 by [Deacon Greg Kandra](#)

408



Many will remember [this story](#) from several days back, about the death of a newly ordained priest. Details at the time were vague; the cause of death was not reported. Now there's more, [from one of his classmates](#):

Last Thursday, our classmate, friend and brother priest, Fr. Kevin Kayda, died unexpectedly, just over a month shy of his 28th birthday. I was having dinner when the email from the Rector of the seminary popped up on the phone, and I stared at the screen in disbelief. There followed a flurry of phone calls and text messages with my classmates across the country. Shock, disbelief, speculation. What happened? Services were planned for the following Monday evening and Tuesday afternoon at Fr. Kevin's home parish, St. Patrick's, in Carlisle, PA. We were on the horn sharing travel plans, coordinating rides. Two of us suggested that we all gather at the Mount, about 50 minutes away from Carlisle. "It will be good for all of us to be together." It seemed natural to go back to our Mountain home. On Saturday we got the official notice, that Fr. Kevin had taken his own life. It was like a sucker punch to the gut, even though some of us had suspected this. Kevin was a quiet guy: shy and introverted, but far from being a loner. I remember the first time I talked to him, at dinner in the seminary dining room, in my first year of theology. He had transferred to the Mount from St. Vincent's seminary, and from the Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston, to his home diocese of Harrisburg. He was not a part of my circle of close friends. We talked regularly, however; he hung out with us, watched movies, went out to meals in Gettysburg and Frederick, shared frustrations and joys. I proofread many of his class papers. He was a regular visitor at our daily post-class Daytime Prayer group, and the lunches that followed, on the patio outside the Caf on sunny days. He was part of the small group of us that shared notes and one-liners, and gabbed regularly on Skype instant messenger. One of our favorite nicknames for him was "Kedar" (a riff on his last name, Kayda), from Psalm 120:5, "*Alas that I live in Meschech, dwell among the tents of Kedar!*" On my first trip to the Holy Land, during Spring break of my second year of theology, Kevin was my roommate. I found a folder on my hard drive on Thursday. "*Kevin – Holy Land Photos.*" I remember him with his camera. As soon as we entered any building, it would be out, and he would click away, pointing at every corner, recording every moment, it seemed. There he is, standing in the Dead Sea ... atop Masada ... on a boat on the Sea of Galilee ... with the Dome of the Rock and the Jerusalem skyline in the background. I went through more photos: our trip to the Holy Land as deacons last December; on my phone, him and his chalice. He was so proud of that chalice! And one of my favorites, our class photo, on the steps of Immaculate Conception Chapel, during our last week at seminary together. In every photo, he has a big smile on his face. Kevin was ordained a Priest of Jesus Christ on June 1, 2013. *Sacerdos in aeternum*, a priest forever! The photo on his Facebook page will be forever etched in my mind. There he is, in a beautiful chasuble, with a simple red orphrey, beaming with the brightest smile I've ever seen, glowing with joy. I saw him last, two weeks later, when we attended the priesthood ordinations for the Archdiocese of Washington at the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception. In the sacristy, embraces, congratulations, exchanging First Blessings. There's another photo, he and I, in the parking lot of the Shrine, smiling. I hadn't talked to him since then. Ours wasn't a friendship of close and regular communication. Suicide is such a terrible and terrifying reality. What I am experiencing is only the outer edge of the maelstrom of devastation it leaves behind. "Why?" "How come none of us saw this?" "We didn't know!" "Why didn't he tell someone?" And, of course, "But, he's a priest!" I can only barely begin to imagine the pain of those closest to him – his parents, his two sisters, his friends, his parishioners, the schoolchildren at the parish school, his DBs and the priests of Harrisburg. I simply cannot comprehend the mental state which would have lead my friend to take this step. I am at wits end, utterly helpless and unable to grasp it. During the funeral Mass, the cry of my heart was, "Lord, how could you not break into his darkness? How could he not perceive your love, your embrace?" To outsiders, depression is a baffling and mysterious reality. It is also a serious illness. Ordination to the priesthood does not erase of our human burdens and frailty. Inside the programs at the funeral, was an essay by [Fr. Ronald Rollheiser OMI on suicide](#). It was a tremendously selfless, courageous and generous act on part of his family to be open about the cause of Fr. Kevin's death.