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Boston Marathon bombing memorial a tribute to faith in time of tragedy

Suzanne Morse | Jun. 25, 2013 NCR Today

They are finally taking down the makeshift memorial to honor the victims of the Boston Marathon bombing. The memorial has taken up a corner of Copley Plaza since they reopened the place nine days after the incident in April. I went down a few weeks after because I wanted to see it before the rains came. The rain we had then, the soaking rains we've had since, has not stopped the memorial's growth. But so much of the memorial consists of handwritten notes that I wanted to see them before they were washed away.

It is a moving sight. The centerpiece is four crosses honoring those who died the week of April 15: Krystle Campbell, Lingzi Lu, MIT police officer Sean Collier and little Martin Richard. Votive candles, shirts, teddy bears, toys and other mementos surround the crosses.

It is the mementos that strike me the most. Boston is a cosmopolitan city that compels people from all over the world to stay at least a little while. So many have felt it important to leave some trinket or object that has some meaning to them -- a large oyster shell with words of comfort; wind chimes; garden gnomes. What is heartening is to see these objects peacefully co-existing with each other -- beautiful origami swans, carefully folded, next to a Native American dream catcher next to sets and sets of rosary beads.

For all of the challenges the Catholic community in Boston has faced in the last decade, Boston is still very much a Catholic town. This is reflected in the fact that the lives of three of the four victims were celebrated at Catholic Masses and in the fact that the interfaith memorial -- attended by President Barack Obama and religious leaders throughout the community -- was held at the Cathedral of the Holy Cross. It is also reflected in the memorial. Along with the dozens of rosary beads, it was easy to see images comforting to Catholics. Someone left a framed 8-by-11 poster of the Sacred Heart of Jesus. Another left a small model of the Pietà. And around the memorial, Catholic schoolchildren left handwritten expressions of love to the victims.

This memorial, though, is truly about what the best of humanity has determined is meaningful. In Boston, so much of our civic pride is tied up with our sports teams, so it is not a surprise that next to the myriad running shoes, people have marked the moment by putting down a baseball cap with Boston's team logos on them. And of course, for so many Bostonians, the expressions of support from our brothers and sisters in New York -- our fiercest rival, who have known their own heartache -- was perhaps the most meaningful of all.

The last few months have reminded the people of Boston -- really, the people of Massachusetts -- who we are: fiercely tribal, fiercely loyal, still reaching for those Catholic symbols of comfort but happy to have them coexist with the thousands of other things that bring meaning to our lives. The loss remains, but the wounds will heal.

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