 The week preceding the Super Bowl was a bit unusual. Usually, the media, especially the sports stations, run non-stop stories about the upcoming gave, developing into all sort of insignificant stories to fill the time on their reports. This year, with the United States Senate addressing the impeachment of President Donald Trump by the House or Representatives, the big game certainly was overshadowed. Even more, the tragic death of Kobe Bryant, his daughter Gianna, John Altobelli, his wife Keir and daughter Alyssa, Christina Mauzer, Sarah Chester and her daughter Payton, and the pilot of the helicopter, Ara Zobayan, dominated the headlines and media for the entire week.

The sudden death of the great retired basketball star at the young age of 41 in an accident, along with so many others, including teenagers is heart-breaking. For a time, we are all stunned by randomness of sudden death and the words of the Gospel come to mind: *However, no one knows the day or hour when these things will happen, not even the angels in heaven or the Son himself. Only the Father knows*. The news shocks us the core and we make a resolution to live our lives to the fullest, to never take for granted our loved ones, to seek to make peace with those with whom we are at odds. That is my reaction, but I must confess it quickly fades back into being frustrated with traffic, complaining about someone, and not being attentive to loved ones. I suppose it is all but impossible to cherish every moment of our lives at all times.

I must confess I was not a big fan of Kobe Bryant when he played for the Lakers. Being a lifetime New York Knick fan, my love was with Willis Reed, Walt Frazier, Dave DeBusschere, and Patrick Ewing. With my New York team being so bad for so long, I found it hard to follow pro-basketball. There is wise saying that we should not speak badly of the dead, but what certainly came to my mind was the serious rape accusation against the star basketball player in 2003. The case was settled out of court, with no criminal trial, and Bryant admitted to adultery. Kobe did issue an apology to the woman and said, although I truly believe this encounter between us was consensual, I recognize now that she did not and does not view this incident the same way I did.

I write this not to defame Kobe Bryant. Over the past week, as a I have read and heard about his life, not his basketball skill, but his life as a husband, father, citizen, mentor, and supporter of programs to assist the young and the needy, I admire how he lived his life since the time of that dark accusation in which the absolute truth is impossible to ascertain. I cannot help but think of the pain he caused the young woman. Yet, from all reports, he has been a good man since that time. I am not seeking to declare Kobe a saint but perhaps a forgiven sinner graced by the mercy of God. Like any marriage, he and his wife admit to having their struggles, but they remained committed to each other until the time of his death. We pray his accuser has found peace and healing.

 To me, I see his life as a kind of redemption story. He has moved from sin and darkness to a light and faith. Our scripture readings the past week have been about King David, the beloved of God and the Jewish people. At one point, filled with pride and lust, David commits adultery and covers up his act with having a man killed in battle. Yet, by the grace of God he returns to God. I think of the thief on the cross who asks Jesus for mercy and in turn hears these works from the dying Jesus: *This day you shall be with me in Paradise.*

Sin, especially sins that cause great damages to another, is never to be taken lightly, nor can we take the mercy of God for granted. God is always merciful but the mercy of God also calls for us to change our lives. The theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer uses the terms *cheap and costly grace.* *Cheap grace* is telling God we are sorry without any desire to change our way. *Costly grace* is the commitment to embrace the mercy of God with a deep commitment to seeking to turn our life toward him and seek to overcome by his grace our sins.

I am always impressed when I see parents coming to early Mass on a Sunday because their child has a sporting event. I never realized Kobe Bryant was a life-long Catholic who credited a priest with helping him at the low point of his life; Kobe Bryant attended 7:00 a.m. Mass before the tragic helicopter flight and both he and his daughter Gianna received Holy Communion. May Kobe Bryant, his daughter Gianna, John Altobelli, his wife Keir and daughter Alyssa, Christina Mauzer, Sarah Chester and her daughter Payton, and the pilot of the helicopter Ara Zobayan be at home with the Lord Jesus. Amen