



Jane Gaudreau, second from left, mother of Johnny and Matthew Gaudreau, and Meredith Gaudreau, middle in blue, widow of Johnny Gaudreau, a winger with the Columbus Blue Jackets hockey team, watch with family and friends as a hearse carries away the casket of Johnny Gaudreau, following the funeral Mass for him and his brother at St. Mary Magdalen Church in Media, Pa., Sept. 9, 2024. The brothers died after being hit by a drunk driver while riding bicycles in New Jersey Aug. 29. Not only is Meredith pregnant, so is Matthew's widow, Madeline, who is expecting the couple's first child. (OSV News/Adam Cairns, USA TODAY Network via Imagn Images/Reuters)

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Media, Pa. — September 13, 2024

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Perseverance, fortitude, grit and calm in the face of a storm often accompany the description of prominent athletes.

At the funeral Mass of deceased brothers Johnny and Matthew Gaudreau Sept. 9 at St. Mary Magdalen Church in Media, however, it was their wives who emulated the aforementioned attributes as they took turns giving words of remembrance for their fallen husbands.

That the brothers' shared funeral Mass — for Johnny, a 31-year-old National Hockey League all-star in the prime of his career, and Matthew, 29, a former standout amateur hockey player who had recently found his niche coaching hockey at his alma mater, Gloucester Catholic High School in the Diocese of Camden, New Jersey — was even taking place still seemed impossible to comprehend.

On Aug. 29, the beyond-close brothers had returned to their boyhood home in Salem County, New Jersey, to celebrate their younger sister Katie's wedding as groomsmen the following day. While riding their bicycles on a rural road around 8 p.m., the two men were killed when, according to New Jersey State Police, an allegedly intoxicated driver, Sean Higgins, plowed into them from behind.

Johnny was the father of a 22-month-old daughter, Noa, a 6-month-old son, Johnny, and a child nine weeks in utero. Matthew's first child is due this December.

Standing strong amid the visible and audible grief that permeated the two-hour

celebration of two lives well lived, Johnny's wife, Meredith, and Matthew's wife, Madeline, attempted to galvanize the packed audience — which included dozens of current and former NHL players from around the globe — by reminding them that death is never the final answer despite a definitively surreal experience.

"In less than three years of marriage, we have created a family of five," said Meredith. "It doesn't even sound possible. But I look at it as the ultimate blessing.

"How lucky am I to be the mother of John's three babies, our last one being a blessing and so special despite these difficult circumstances," she said. "Despite losing my husband way too soon, I still feel like the luckiest girl in the world to be his wife."

Speaking in the present tense, Meredith looked toward Johnny's coffin.

"I miss you so much, and I love you," she said. "You are my forever, and I cannot wait until we are all together again. Please watch over us."

Madeline expressed gratitude for their life together as a family and acknowledged the uncanny camaraderie shared by the two brothers.

"Matt will surround his son for the rest of his life," she said. "I'm so thankful God gave us a child ... to run around for life, to carry on his legacy. Tripp will know how much his father loved him.

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"However, their legacy will live on through the lives of everyone they touched — their kids, their wives, their parents, their siblings.

"God really did draft the best two boys," Madeline said. "Line mates forever."

At the end of the courageous tribute, Madeline encouraged people not to drink and drive.

"Call a ride," she pleaded. "Please do not put another family through this torture."

Tom Iacovone, who is in his fifth year as principal at Gloucester Catholic, where both Gaudreau brothers stood out as talented athletes and kind, generous, and spirited gentlemen, told OSV News the entire community has been significantly

affected by the incomprehensible catastrophe.

"It's incredibly hard to take any positive from this tragic event where our Gloucester Catholic family and the entire world lost two amazing young men," said Iacovone. "However, as I was sitting in church on Monday at the funeral Mass, the homily touched me.

"The homily was about the incredible love that Matt and John had for one another, and that love came from the incredible family they have, especially their Mom (Jane) and Dad (Guy). If we all can learn from Matt and John, and live our lives with that kind of love for others, this world will be better for it."

Since graduating, the brothers continued to support their alma mater through an annual golf fundraiser that has raised thousands of dollars to financially benefit families seeking a Gloucester Catholic education.

"The entire Gaudreau family are role models," Iacovone said. "In this tragedy they have shown the world what it means to live a life of love and kindness. I know that I will focus more on showing my own kids and my students what it means to love others as Matt and John did. My hope is that others will do the same."