

Please forgive us, little victims asked

By [VIVIAN SONG](#), SUN MEDIA

WOODBIDGE, Ont. -- In a rare display of emotion, a man of God stood before 1,000 mourners and broke down as he spoke about the children he baptized and the couple he married.

Rev. Michael Corcione brought the congregation to tears yesterday as he asked two little girls, slain last week, for forgiveness.

"Forgive the one who should have loved you above all things but did not. Forgive those who wanted to love you every day and protect you from all harm but could not," he said with his voice breaking.

Corcione alluded to the tragic circumstances of the Campione girls' deaths.

Serena, 3, and Sophia, 1, were found dead in a Barrie apartment last Wednesday. Their mother, Elaine Campione, faces two counts of first-degree murder.

Gripping the sides of the pulpit, Corcione struggled briefly to compose himself against the strength of his words. Earlier he had acknowledged the futility of words in such circumstances.

But his appeal to Serena and Sophia, who lay in two small white caskets, provoked a domino effect filling the sanctuary of St. Peter's Roman Catholic Church with heartbreaking sobs from mothers, fathers, friends and relatives.

"Forgive those who should have protected you because it was their appointed duty but did not ... Forgive us, we ask you, this day, for all those things that we could not and did not do for you. How sorry we are that we failed you."

In a candid but veiled homily, Corcione also criticized the failings of the child welfare system.

Neighbours and friends have told the Sun Elaine was given custody of the girls over the father Leo, despite having been treated for psychiatric problems. The couple were involved in a messy custody battle.

"We must never forget to fight for justice in this case and in every case where children are the innocent victims of a system that does not protect them," Corcione said.

Mourners shared Corcione's concerns, slamming the child welfare system for "failing the children."

"Somebody dropped the ball," said Nick Pinto, a friend and neighbour of the girls' grandparents, Diego and Anna Campione. "Steps should be taken so mistakes aren't made again."