

explosion.

"At the end of the mass they saw one young man go into the church in with a heavy bag," Fernando said.

"He touched my granddaughter's head on the way past. It was the bomber."

'I'm so lucky'

The family wondered why he was entering the church with mass nearly over, Fernando said, adding that the man had looked to be around 30 and "very young and innocent", according to his relatives.

"He was not excited or afraid. He was so calm."

Shortly after the man entered the church, there was a massive

blast.

"They heard it and quickly ran away, they were so afraid. They called me immediately to ask if I was inside the church, but by then I was in a different church."

He said no one in his family had been killed or injured, but that the community had been devastated by the attack.

"I'm so lucky because normally I would go to this church. We are relieved, we were so lucky but we're really sad for the whole village," he said.

"There are going to be huge funerals in this village soon."

But he added that Sri Lanka's Roman Catholic community, a minority that makes up just six percent of the population, would

not be intimidated.

"If the church was open this morning then I would have gone inside. We are not afraid. We won't let terrorists win, no way."

'Revenge is useless'

And he said that he hoped the attack would not trigger revenge killings.

"Revenge is useless. It's the responsibility of the government to control this, not us."

He criticised the government, which has acknowledged that there was information warning of attacks before Sunday's blasts.

"An attack like this should have been avoided," he said.

Around the church, Negombo appeared to be waking up

as normal, after the lifting of an overnight nationwide curfew at 6:00 am (0030 GMT).

A steady stream of people were walking or moving on streets on bicycles and motorbikes or in tuk-tuks.

Outside the church, Fernando and other bystanders look at the damage to the church.

Inside the church grounds, around a dozen pairs of shoes belonging to victims were piled up under a tree, with more lined up outside the church doors.

One men's shoe had been ripped in half and blood sat congealed inside it.

Nuns, priests and Buddhist monks came to pay respects.

"This is an attack on everyone,"

said Suthammo Thero, a Buddhist monk from Poland who lives in Sri Lanka.

"I used to be a Catholic so it is very sad for me," the 45-year-old said.

Fernando said the church had been renovated just a month earlier.

"It was looking so beautiful. We were so happy," he said.

"The priest was awarded for the job he had done.

But now this has happened, it's terrible."



A woman looks into a container where bodies of bomb blast victims are kept at a hospital in Negombo

Death toll hits 290



People who live near the church that was attacked



A woman and her new born baby who live near the Church that was attacked



The mother of Shaini, 13, who died in the blasts mourns at her wake in Negombo

Relatives endure grim screening to identify dead at morgue

Colombo, Sri Lanka

Some hid their eyes, some collapsed in tears as gruesome images of victims from Sri Lanka's Easter massacre were projected on to a screen in front of distraught relatives at a Colombo morgue yesterday.

The pictures of some of the 290 dead are disturbing, with faces battered and bodies missing limbs.

A Roman Catholic priest and a Buddhist counterpart waited in the corner of the courtyard to intervene when one of scores of people in the audience recognised a mother, brother or child.

Many of the dead from attacks on three churches and three luxury hotels have been taken to the government morgue and people queued in the heat to get into the heart-wrenching identification slideshow.

Eighteen bodies were released yesterday morning after relatives recognised a victim from the gruesome images shown in a corner of the morgue courtyard.

Identification is painstaking, physically and emotionally. Many badly mutilated bodies will only be identified with the DNA of relatives, officials said.

Janaka Shaktivel, 28, father of an 18-month-old son, sat in shock outside the building waiting for the body of his wife to be handed

over.

The storeowner's wife died when a suicide bomber hit St Anthony's Shrine, one of Colombo's most famous churches.

Saved by baby's tears

Pale and grief-stricken, Shaktivel said he remembered lighting candles with his wife and baby.

"My baby started crying, I took him outside and my wife stayed inside.

"I was just at the door when I heard an ear-splitting sound. I rushed inside but there were unbelievable scenes. I frantically looked for my wife but couldn't find her."

Shaktivel went on a grim tour of Colombo hospitals and finally to the morgue, where he was one of many

to be called up to see the images and then inspect a body.

"I recognised her body from the wedding ring that she always wore," he said. "I have no words to explain my feelings."

Shalini Juwinitta Gomez, 31, lost her elder brother and his three children -- the youngest just eight months old.

The family had identified two of the dead and were waiting to find others. The brother's wife is in intensive care in hospital with serious leg injuries.

"The baby was so cute, he was only eight months old," said Gomez. "His head was blown off, I have gone numb. What did he do to deserve this?"

As Gomez watched pictures of bodies

flash up on the screen she broke down, slowly identifying her family one by one.

Still the outside official satop at the out more Volun- water and entering "We are families. h a v e

teers handed out juice to relatives the room.

"We are supporting the Lots of people come here from

faraway places," Father Lawrence Ramanayake said.

"They are very poor people, we have to support them from the church," added the pastor. "The church is doing everything possible to help the families."

Police and doctors waited to greet families as they left the projection room, offering help. More Catholic nuns and priests waited to give advice on funerals. "It's an unprecedented situation. We are doing our best," said a help- I e s s morgue worker.



Security personnel stand guard outside St. Anthony's Shrine in Colombo