

Monastic Scribe LIII: June 9, 2023

SEXUALITY – X RATED?

June is designated as Pride Month. Rainbow flags let us know who is actively celebrating it. And what is it about? It is a time to honor those who accept and honor their own sexuality as lesbian, gay, bisexual, queer, transgender. They are the people who have been condemned by many good religious people. The Vatican once called them intrinsically disordered. In some countries they can be arrested and jailed, even killed, for declaring their sexuality.

I have always been reticent in talking about sex. Maybe it is because I have known and understood so little! Of course I am an embodied person, a male person, so I know what sexuality is all about. But I grew up with an inadequate awareness of what homosexuality was all about. It was not until I was an adolescent seminarian that I began to comprehend the fuller dimensions of sexuality. I was living in an open dormitory when, one night, another guy started climbing into bed with me. When I reacted with surprise he said he was returning from the bathroom to the wrong bed! I often wondered after that! But, more significantly, there were guys that became my friends. Then they were dismissed from the seminary and I could not understand why. In those pre-Vatican II days I always believed that authority figures knew what they were doing even if I did not! Like so much else about the church, I did not question. Thank God those days are gone.

Pope Francis' response to a question about gay people was "Who am I to judge?" That made us rethink what we thought. I had already learned to be accepting of such people but now I had to rethink more positively about these children of God. I was shocked to hear a pastor of a church who dismissed one of the lectors when it was discovered he was gay without knowing anything of his private life. When the sexual abuse crisis came upon us, there were some, including bishops and priests, who blamed homosexuals for such abusive actions. This was really wrong!

We recently had Father James Martin, SJ, speak in our lecture series. He spoke principally about prayer and spirituality. But he also included his ministry to LGBTQ people. He is the editor of a weekly online service called "Outreach" which I now receive every Saturday. What compassion and love I now recognize. These people are God's children whom God loves unconditionally as God loves all of us. And it is just not these individuals who have suffered in the church. Their parents,

Monastic Scribe LIII: June 9, 2023

grandparents, friends and relatives have all suffered as they felt the pain endured by their loved ones. What kind of church condemns these people?

I have heard of how so many LGBTQ men and women desire to take part in the Catholic Church and want a religious and spiritual home. I ask myself are they like other people who have suffered and been rejected who then developed a more intensive interior life? I look at Blacks and the deep spirituality that came from their slavery years. I look at indigenous people who were massacred. I look at women who feel they are secondhand citizens in the church. Perhaps LGBTQ Christians are the same, more in touch with their inner longing for God.

The more public awareness of transgender people requires even more acceptance and love. I do not pretend to understand it all. But I believe that some people could be born this way and that is how God made them.

The comments of Cardinal Wilton Gregory, Archbishop of Washington, D.C., to a transgender person in 2019 help me. At a “Theology on Tap” gathering a young man asked him “What place do I have as a confirmed transgender Catholic and what place do my queer friends have here in this archdiocese?” Cardinal Gregory responded, “You belong to the heart of this church. There is nothing that you may do, may say, that will rip you from the heart of this church. There is a lot that has been said to you, behind your back that is painful and sinful... We have to find a way to talk to one another. I think that is the way Jesus ministered. He engaged people, he took them where they are, and he invited them to go deeper, closer to God. If you ask me where you fit? You fit in the family.”

These words of Cardinal Gregory have helped to free me to acknowledge, speak about, believe in all disadvantaged people, including all who have any variation of sexual identity. It also convinces me more surely that the church is in dire need of a new Theology of Sexuality. This has to be a theology of human love, of love of creation and the human body, of respect and responsibility for each other. Sexuality is a great gift from God by which we express God’s love for each of us and reaches out in relationship to form the unity of which Jesus prayed. Any comments welcome at: joycet@glastonburyabbey.org

Fr. Timothy Joyce, OSB, STL

Monastic Scribe LIII: June 9, 2023

Please note that I do not speak on behalf of Glastonbury Abbey, the Archdiocese of Boston or the Catholic Church, though I hope my faith is in harmony with all these. Any error in judgment should be credited to me and not anyone else.