

Monastic Scribe XLII: January 6, 2023

THAT ALL MAY BE ONE

A friend of mine, John, recently wrote to me, “Many people ask me how I can stay in a church that calls my two gay children ‘disordered.’ I tell them I know too many people in the church who don’t believe that, and I don’t believe Jesus would think that either.” That Jesus wouldn’t believe that is so obvious. He accepted and loved people as they were, did not judge them even if he might disapprove of some of their behavior. He ate meals, the gospels tell us, “with tax collectors and with sinners” and scandalized some good religious people. Pope Francis has followed his example. The Pope has embraced gay, lesbian, transgender people.

In Western Europe and our own country LGBTQ people are accepted, even if begrudgingly, by good religious people. There are some other countries where they might be put to death, jailed, or forced into conversion therapy if their unacceptable sexual orientation was discovered. But even here, the recent tragedy in Colorado Springs has followed other such incidents where fear of those who are different has led to hatred and then to violence. It is still dangerous for these children of God. Many of them live in fear and shame and need help to accept themselves as good and loved. The Catholic Church has been slow to see them as God’s children and as their own brothers and sisters in Christ. Sadly there are still too many bishops, priests and lay people who don’t agree with Jesus or the Pope. And there are still such statements as “inherently disordered” on the books that are harsh and unloving. Pastors have dismissed or fired teachers in schools or liturgical ministers when they are found to be LGBTQ people.

I have always felt that I knew little and understood little about sexual orientation and have been hesitant to say anything. I was comfortable as a white, celibate, heterosexual male and thought I was open in accepting and following Jesus. But, lately, I have been reading and hearing people’s stories that make me more aware of the lack of love we Catholics have felt and shown. I have been hearing stories of terrible discrimination and hatred.

There is a sign outside our monastery that simply proclaims “All Are Welcome.” I want that to be true and hope it is a clear invitation. I often think our congregation of monks and laity would be enriched by more Blacks, Latinos, Asians and other minorities, as well as more youth. I am aware that there are gay

Monastic Scribe XLII: January 6, 2023

men who worship with us and I hope other LGBTQ people feel as welcome. Jesus prayed fervently, the night before he died, that we would all be one as he and his father were one. It is what we should be about.

Another recent incident has urged me to speak up. Our inter-faith lecture series had James Martin, SJ, scheduled to be our speaker on the state of the church. He is an editor at “America” magazine and an author of many books including his recent book on Prayer. He wasn’t able to keep his scheduled date for the talk and we have postponed it to the Spring. The truth is he had to cancel our lecture because he had to stay in Rome where he had a private audience with the Pope who blessed Jim’s work. Meanwhile I had about six letters complaining about our having Father Jim to speak. One writer said that Saint Benedict must be ashamed of us! Another said she would not donate to the abbey anymore. I imagine these are all good Catholics but I also wonder whether they have actually read what he has written about the need for the church to reach out to LGBTQ people. Neither he, nor I for that matter, speak of same sex marriage or proper sexual activity. I leave that to more competent legal and moral experts.

What is evident to me is that the Church must articulate a more convincing, sacred theology of sexuality. I don’t think that would mean anything goes but that sex is a sacred gift to be lived with reverence, maturity and respect for the other. Virginity has often seemed to be the only real sexual position the church approves of. Thus, until recently, almost all canonized Saints have been either virgins or martyrs. And why do some Bishops, priests and others continue to uphold their belief that it is mainly gay people who have been the perpetrators of sexual abuse when studies have shown this is not true? It often looks like we are really afraid of our bodies and our sexuality. We have a Puritan disdain for the bodily.

Well, I will see now what kind of feedback I get for writing these lines. You can contact me at: joycet@glastonburyabbey.org

Fr. Timothy Joyce, OSB, STL

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.