

A cry for understanding

I received an email from Martha yesterday. As I read her email, I began to realize that both she and her son were dealing with tough issues. The email went on to explain. "I loved to go to Mass and to be inspired. Sadly I haven't been to Mass in years regularly. When our son went off to college I was at Mass and my priest gave a sermon on the evils of homosexuality, My precious son is gay. I've known since he was a small child that he was gay. I struggle so much with how can he/the gay community be demonized when that is the way that our God created him. The priest that recently came out to his congregation (up North) was so inspirational to me. It made my heart sing. I keep thinking I can find a church/denomination to belong to that is accepting.... but in the background my heart says you are Catholic. How does one reconcile "the church" pushing your child away when he is the most precious thing ever in my life?"

What does one say to a woman who wants to belong but feels pushed away from the church? What does one say to a woman who feel demonized by the church because her son is gay? Does one throw the book at her and her son and say sorry but the rules are the rules so accept them or find some place else?

Back in 1976, when I served as a Youth Director, I did a retreat for a group of young people. One young man, a senior in high school, came to me with his struggle. He was struggling with accepting being a homosexual as well as how to communicate such to his parents. Back then, society was not as open as at present in talking about it.

In more recent times, my nephew indicated that he was gay. I was aware of the fact, long before he informed me. Yet, he is accepted and loved by his parents and siblings.

Do we adopt the attitude of "an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth? " How do we reconcile that with a more Jesus era approach of "neither do I condemn you, go and sin no more"? Do we adopt a more judgmental approach or a more scriptural approach that says, "it is mercy I desire?" Do we become more Pharisaic in our approach or more understanding of the torturous journey of some people?

When I receive emails like Martha's, I am always reminded of a quote from theologian, Carlo Carretto, where he says, "How baffling you are, oh Church, and yet how I love you! How you have made me suffer, and yet how much I owe you! I would like to see you destroyed, and yet I need your presence. You have given me so much scandal and yet you have made me understand what sanctity is. I have seen nothing in the world more devoted to obscurity, more compromised, more false, and yet I have touched nothing more pure, more generous, more beautiful. How often I have wanted to shut the doors of my soul in your face, and how often I have prayed to die in the safety of your arms.

No, I cannot free myself from you, because I am you, though not completely. And besides, where would I go? Would I establish another? I would not be able to establish it without the same faults, for they are the same faults I carry in me. And if I did establish another, it would be my Church, not the Church of Christ. I am old enough to know that I am no better than anyone else. ...

The Church has the power to make me holy but it is made up, from the first to the last, only of sinners. And what sinners! It has the omnipotent and invincible power to renew the Miracle of the Eucharist, but is made up of men who are stumbling in the dark, who fight every day against the temptation of losing their faith. It brings a message of pure transparency but it is incarnated in slime, such is the substance of the world. It speaks of the sweetness of its Master, of its non-violence, but there was a time in history when it sent out its armies to disembowel the infidels and torture the heretics. It proclaims the message of evangelical poverty, and yet it does nothing but look for money and alliances with the powerful.

Those who dream of something different from this are wasting their time and have to rethink it all. And this proves that they do not understand humanity. Because this is humanity, made visible by the Church, with all its flaws and its invincible courage, with the Faith that Christ has given it and with the love that Christ showers on it."

Now Martha is waiting for my response? Will I offer an olive branch or a stick? Will I sympathize or chastise? Will I accept or condemn? "Hi Martha....."