

5th Sunday of Lent

The Vatican's Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith responded "Negative" this week to the question, "Does the Church have the power to give the blessing to unions of persons of the same sex?" Predictably, that ignited controversy. The Congregation explained what the Church is capable of doing in light of the belief that our Creator made man and woman for the sake of a union that may produce children. Procreation is the way that males and females are ordered; same sex unions cannot achieve the same results. The Congregation concludes that the Church cannot therefore impart blessings on "a union not ordered to the Creator's plan."

Of course, others see it differently. Some hold that persons with homosexual inclinations who seek a union are responding in faith to the Creator's plan for them. They do not see why such a commitment cannot be blessed. The rhetoric between these conflicting views is often heated, but at their simplest forms these observations come from people of faith discerning God's will, and that alone can lay a foundation for mutual respect.

Although the Vatican's conclusion will strike many people as insensitive, the statement uses more caring language than we've seen in the Church's previous treatments of this topic. It praises the "sincere desire to welcome and accompany homosexual persons," it affirms that "God loves every person and the Church does the same," and it rejects "all unjust discrimination." It says, "The Christian community and its Pastors are called to welcome with respect and sensitivity persons with homosexual inclinations."

Today's gospel introduces some Greeks who want to be welcomed with respect and sensitivity among Jews in Jerusalem. They approach a presumably friendly apostle with a Greek name, Philip, who seeks out another apostle with a Greek name, Andrew. The visitors make a request that belongs on the lips of any spiritual seeker: "Sir, we would like to see Jesus." There are pulpits in some churches with this verse carved on top for the preacher to see, as if the people are saying to him, "Sir, when you preach, we would like to see Jesus—not you."

When Andrew and Philip approach Jesus, his response sounds directed to some other request: "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified." Jesus compares himself to a grain of wheat that dies in order to produce much fruit; he challenges those who prefer this life to life in the world to come; those who want to serve him must follow him—all the way to the cross. Hearing of visitors wanting to gain an encounter, Jesus responded with a message about loss. To the Father, he says, "glorify your name." Then in words that would finally comfort the Greeks, Jesus alludes to his cross and says, "when I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw everyone to myself"—even the Greeks. And even those with different inclinations. Jesus died on the cross for everyone, and he drew everyone to himself. Catholic priests cannot bless some unions, but we do bless all persons at the end of every Mass—all, whom Jesus drew to himself.

Sunday, March 21, 2021

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Christ calls each of us to serve him, follow him, die to ourselves and bear much fruit. If we do that, whenever any person says to us, "I want to see Jesus," we can say, "Look right here." They will see him in each one of us.

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