

Gay couples are marching down the aisle in some of America's courthouses. Some people are outraged. Others are celebrating. Debates are raging over questions like, "Is this legal?" and "Is this moral?"

The Catechism of the Catholic Church both affirms and challenges homosexuals. It distinguishes between tendencies and actions. Some people have a same-sex attraction, but they do not act on it – just as some people with heterosexual tendencies do not act on them. The catechism says this: homosexuals "must be accepted with respect, compassion, and sensitivity. Every sign of unjust discrimination in their regard should be avoided. These persons are called to fulfill God's will in their lives and, if they are Christians, to unite to the sacrifice of the Lord's Cross the difficulties they may encounter from their condition." But, the catechism stresses that homosexual acts "are contrary to the natural law. They close the sexual act to the gift of life. They do not proceed from a genuine affective and sexual complementarity. Under no circumstances can they be approved." The catechism asks homosexuals to practice chastity and attain spiritual perfection through prayer, sacraments and the support of the community. So, we affirm and we challenge: We should not discriminate against gays, but we do not approve gay sex. Our church opposes legislation permitting gay marriages, but supports human rights.

Recently some Catholic leaders have criticized the vocabulary church documents use to describe homosexual relations. Even in the catechism, you will find expressions like "acts of grave depravity" and "intrinsically disordered." Many gays do not seem to be depraved and disordered; many of them seem charitable and honest. We probably need to work on words that show more compassion. Our society has become more accepting of gays in committed relationships; that is why our church has recently emphasized our position. It will be important for church and society to come to better understanding and reconciliation.

Paul speaks to the Corinthians today about reconciliation. He says God reconciled us to himself through Christ, and that God has entrusted to us the message of reconciliation. So we are ambassadors for Christ, as if God were appealing through us.

God sent Christ for reconciliation. No matter who we are, how we think, what we have done, or what we failed to do, Christ came for our reconciliation. Christ then sends us for reconciliation. As ambassadors, we admonish others to be reconciled to God.

During Lent we admit our sins before God. We do penance in order to leave them behind and live for God alone. We can formalize our sorrow at our parish penance service next week. God offers us reconciliation, and we become ambassadors to it. As we meet people with whom we do not agree, whose behaviors need challenging, we reach out to them with the

gospel, in charity and respect, and invite them to the mystery of reconciliation.

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Paul tells the Ephesians Christians live in the light of the Lord. Others dwell in darkness, and the light of Christ comes to shine on them. Tonight we celebrate the second scrutiny of our elect, preparing them for baptism this Easter. A scrutiny presumes that inside them is the darkness of being apart from Christ, a darkness that has led to sin. We pray that when baptism comes, Christ may dispel that darkness and fill them with light.

We all have darkness inside. We are all guilty of sin. During Lent we do penance to turn from sin. We can formalize our sorrow at our parish penance service next week. God offers us reconciliation and we become

ambassadors to it. The light of Christ dispels the darkness within us and prepares us for the good news of redemption this Easter.

As we meet people with whom we do not agree, whose behaviors need challenging, we reach out to them with the gospel, in charity and respect, and invite them to the mystery of light.