

Homily: LGBTQIA+ Pride Mass 2024

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Welcome to you all, as we celebrate LGBTQIA+ pride day!

One of our parents told me a story. A little girl, Sally, was drawing a picture. And one of her parents asked, “Sally, what are your drawing?” “I’m drawing a picture of God,” she said. And her parent laughed, “Sally, no one knows what God looks like!” “Just wait!” she replied.

But how often we draw our own image of God! For many, even today, the image of God is that of a stern lawgiver, a harsh and unrelenting judge—a God keeping a divine ledger in heaven, weighing my sins, my many sins against me. I remember one little girl I was supposedly teaching who had reduced the entire 10 commandments to a litany of “thou shalt nots....” The Law was given as the bond of love, signifying the intimacy of God, but it has become, Jesus tells us, a burden hard to carry, a token of divine exclusion.

And yet the Scriptures draw a very different image, if we have eyes to see. The words of the Decalogue reveal not a divine nay-saying, but a profound “Thou shalt”! “Thou shalt live!” Listen to the words of Deuteronomy, recounting the Law (Deut. 30): “Look, today I am offering you life and prosperity, death and disaster. If you obey the commandments of Yahweh your God, which I am laying down for your today, if you love Yahweh your God and follow his ways, if you keep his commandments, his laws and his customs, you will live and grow numerous, and Yahweh your God will bless you... Today I call heaven and earth to witness against you: I am offering you life or death, blessing or curse. *Choose life*, then, so that you and your descendants may live, in the love of Yahweh your God...”

Dear friends, the 10 commandments are a loving response to love. And again and again, as the words of Elijah in our First Reading remind us, Israel must choose: choose life and blessing in Covenant fidelity, fidelity that will be measured by care for the least in her midst. Love is the measure.

And so too the words of our Gospel today. For in the Sermon the Mount, Matthew depicts Jesus not as a new Moses dispensing the law, but as the giver of the Law, the one who reveals its meaning. And in the verses before our Gospel today Jesus shows us the way of Covenant fidelity, of choosing blessing. “Blessed

are the poor in Spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of God, blessed are they who mourn, for they shall be comforted. Blessed the meek and merciful, the single-hearted, the seekers of justice and peace. Blessed those persecuted for the sake of justice, theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”

Again, there is placed before us momentous choice: life and death, blessing and curse. The beatitudes, like the parables of Jesus, reveal, in salvific irony, the Way of discipleship, the reign of God. For the poor are blest, not because they are poor, but because their affliction cries out to the Blessed One in whose love they live. They are blessed because of the One who speaks the blessing, Jesus, the Christ, who is God’s blessing of life.

In the beatitudes, the blessings of Jesus, there is no logic binding blessing and poverty, mourning, persecution, as indeed there is no logic binding cross and resurrection save Jesus himself. Finally, it is in him, and only in him that the poor are blessed, the naked clothed in mercy, the stranger comforted: Here our inference is a person: and the consequence, the conclusion we draw is the issue of our lives. Will we choose blessing or curse, life or death? It is the word of Jesus, God’s word, that cuts to bone and marrow, revealing a God, as Augustine says, more intimate to us than we are to our very selves. It is a Word, A Gospel that elicits and demands our freedom. Blessing is before us but also curse; Divine Compassion if our hearts be not hardened, our ears deaf to the God who bears our curse, our nakedness, our poverty in a crucified love.

So, dear friends, the First Act of this divine drama that is our lives is God’s. You are blessed, beloved. You bear the very image of God; and none can take this from you, never. It is God’s gift, and wonderful to behold. But the Second Act is ours: we must live the blessing that we are. For each of us is called, summoned by name to follow, no less than the first disciples. Each of us is called to let the Word of Jesus take flesh in us, to let the Gospel become the story of our lives.

And it is a hard grace as this 8th anniversary of the shooting at the Pulse Nightclub reminds us. How often the truest followers of Jesus will face persecution, exclusion: “Blessed are you when they insult you and persecute you and utter every kind of evil against you because of me.” No, to live the Beatitudes is to live into blessing, little by little, knowing that nothing can separate us from the love of God. Each of us is called by name, each to tell her unique story; one only you can tell.

And the final Act, dear friends, brings the First and Second together: for we are blest, and in living into blessing, the blessing that you are, we make up the Church, Christ's body. For each is called uniquely by name, but always in solidarity. Our stories rhyme, becoming together, the story of God's reign. Yes, our Church is wounded, we are earthen vessels. Even Pope Francis, so genuinely welcoming to all, may fail or misspeak; but always he points to Jesus. It is to him we must turn in living the beatitudes that Francis says are the charter of our Christian lives. As in Elijah's time, so too we are called to repair our broken altars that we may worship in the bonds of love.

Holy Trinity prides itself on being a place of worship for all; for many years our LGBTQIA+ community has welcomed every sister or brother. There are indeed no strangers here. But it is not only we at Trinity who are offering hospitality. No, it is you who offer hospitality: You remain faithful even when we fail; you hold to the Body even when, at time, it has rejected you. What a wonderful gift to the Church, your fidelity, your hospitality. The Church would be incomplete without you—without your grace and blessing.

So, dear friends, let us hold to blessing, to life. In Christ, there is no separation of Jew or Greek, slave or free, woman or man, gay or straight. There is only the image of God you bear, you always bear. So in a world riven by hate and violence, we too might say with Sally, when asked about the picture: Just wait! Look around, look about you. The image of God is being drawn in your life, in our lives little by little. And it is something wonderful to behold, something beautiful to celebrate.