



LESS THAN KIND

A fan letter leads this Pastor down a familiar, painful road; she returned with good advice for all of us.

I suppose I should not have been surprised, but I was caught off guard. I received a kind note from a reader complimenting my column from October's issue of *Just Out* titled "Great Sex? Thank God!" The note's writer thanked me for the article and then suggested I check out an "outreach to gay and lesbian people" from the Catholic Church.

The writer is unlikely to have known that I grew up Catholic and am well aware of the Catholic Church's teachings on homosexuality, authored in 1986 by the man who is now pope. That 1986 document labeled homosexuality as an immutable trait, not subject to change, but also as a spiritual illness and as a condition leading to "a moral tendency toward evil."

Nevertheless, with 26 years having passed since that official teaching damning me and mine was published and the present day, some small part of me hoped that there might have been a thaw in the rhetoric, a crack in the ice that I'd somehow missed.

I went to the website that had been recommended and ... there it was again — the direction to "surrender same sex attractions into the agony of Jesus," the invitation to join reparative groups, the pervasive hypocrisy present in the teaching that a loving God would give us the "affliction" of same sex attraction so that we could overcome that through our love for Him [sic].

I don't think the writer of this piece of "fan mail" meant to be cruel, but repeating this plunge of the axe into my spiritual roots was less than kind. You see, as a child, teenager and young adult, I loved the Catholic Church, heart and soul. When I learned, over two decades ago, of the church's betrayal of God's promise to love me unconditionally, the shock and pain destroyed my sense of being God's beloved own, and although grace has restored my faith, that pain still echoes in unguarded moments.

This is what I would say to all those religious institutions whose "outreach" to the LGBTQ community consists of trying to "repair our brokenness." Look to your own brokenness. Look to your own willingness to condemn, to judge, to cleave off the bright giftedness of those who have been drawn to your light. If your doctrine cannot tolerate difference, if your practice cannot allow you to embrace the other, if your religion has no resilience in the face of humanity, your faith is too poor.

This month, many of us will make an annual pilgrimage to visit families of origin where an insidious whisper of this kind of impoverished faith, begging us to return to a path that was never ours, will hum along with Christmas carols in the background. Don't listen. Celebrate instead the miracle of light, the new birth, the return of the sun heralding more love, more joy, more hope, more compassion and more kindness yet to break forth. Pay no attention to the death rattles of institutional denominations that would strangle our spirits. There are more open, welcoming paths that will bring us truly home. §



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