

In wake of gay marriage ruling, we chase holiness - in love

By Kevin Wells

My freshman roommate in college was smarter than hell, the best actor on campus, kind and wittier than anyone I knew. I remember we'd crack each other up deep into the night from the darkness of our bunks. But other than our shared sarcasm, appreciation for the liberal arts and a mild devotion to the Smiths, Depeche Mode and Erasure, we didn't share much in common; so we fell into different sets of friends sophomore year and moved on.

I didn't know he was gay. And when a few years ago on Facebook I saw he took his vows in what looked to be the heart of Times Square, I'm pretty sure I felt joy for him. I felt it because he radiated joy, as did his glowing partner. Dozens of smiling family and friends gushed with happiness. The photos were stunning.

This is how Catholics respond to joy. The happiest people I know are faithful Catholics. They mirror the joy of others.

But faithful Catholics have got a problem. I've got a problem.

No matter what decision the Supreme Court arrived at last week in regard to same-sex marriage, we know the sacrament of matrimony is between a man and a woman. And because we know this, suddenly many say we are bigots. Overnight, I'm a hater.

And if this is so, I've got a big problem on my hands. Truly, a big one.

I'm damned to hell.

When Jesus said in John 15:12, “This is my commandment: love one another as I have loved you,” he made it all pretty uncomplicated.

Simply, if I hate my old roommate or any other individual with same-sex attraction, I’m a hypocrite and an awful follower of Christ. I deserve hell. And when the bright light of judgment is set squarely upon me at the end, I wouldn’t even try to bargain or convince Him of otherwise. I get the trapdoor.

But let’s say I actually manage to do a fairly decent job of loving others in my life. But I still judge others here and there. No good. It’s locked into Scripture that I’ll get slammed with God’s judgment by an embarrassing barrage of reminders of my own sinfulness.

Jesus made it easy. Love. Don’t judge.

I love people with same-sex attraction. Every one of them - and not in some cheesy, Christian-y, weird-toothy-smiley-kind-of-way. But in a manner that invites him or her into my life, so that hopefully, we can become friends.

But friends - good ones anyway - speak truth to one another. They propose. They don’t impose. I would explain why my faith teaches that homosexual acts are sinful. And if he didn’t punch me in the nose or run out of the room forever, I’d explain why I, personally, thought so - mentioning nature perhaps before all else. And if my nose wasn’t bleeding, I’d allow him wide berth for his counter.

Then I’d mention something like this: My wife and I wanted to have 10 kids - we said as much on our first date. Well, shortly after marrying, we discovered we weren’t blessed that way. We could have zero kids.

In-vitro fertilization, though, offered the promise of many kids. We were so happy. Then we studied Natural Law, consulted the Catechism and the magisterium, talked

to wise priests and prayed continually. The mystery of the cross and our participation in it came into view. We began to wrap our minds around the depth, meaning and glory of redemptive suffering.

Although I would have walked through fire to have a child warm within my wife's womb, we instead offered our sickening pain to God as a gift. Two thousand years of unbending teaching revealed to us why in-vitro fertilization, perhaps, wasn't the way.

Because of pride, many of us have a rather cocky tendency to want to manipulate God's revealed truth and fashion it to our needs. I've done it. It's disgraceful. I've made myself into a god, and buffeted myself with an incoherent empire of rationalizations, lies and validations akin to, "Well, God just wants me to be happy, so he understands."

But all that matters is Truth. And obliging his will. We know Truth because Jesus talked for three years. And folks wrote about it.

After boring my new friend with my infertility tale, I'd humbly propose that all I really cared about was his soul - and that if he chose to offer chastely his same-sex desire to God as a gift, that he would become a saint - one of the noblest, most heroic saints in heaven. A white martyr, in fact. I'd tell him that I could easily imagine Jesus racing to him, wrapping his arms around him and weeping copious tears of gladness as he came into view.

"Oh boy, I love you. Oh boy, I love you," perhaps Jesus would say. "Now, please come. I want you to meet all the martyrs. They know all about you."

And if he said, "Ah, Kevin. Poppycock," guess what - I would still want him as my friend - not as a meatless Facebook friend - but as one that is always welcomed to my house and sits with my family at the dinner table and then kicks back at my

backyard bonfire pit with an ice cold beer, like some of my other friends.

There have been evenings charged with laughter and storytelling when 20 or so of my friends have joined me around that bonfire. And this I know: all 20 would love that man with same-sex attraction. And all 20 would not judge. Twenty would love.

Contrary to what millions of gay-marriage supporters might think, faithful Catholics aren't a bunch of hyper-charged zealots telling people whom they can sleep with. Catholics, in fact, would rather race to danger, to federal prisons, flood-ravaged areas, the world's poorest towns and to thousands of other places where love is required.

When a panhandler extends a palm on the corner of gridlocked D.C. intersection, a faithful Catholic opens his car door and embraces the man while he gives him cash (in front of hundreds of stressed, slack-jawed commuters).

Faithful Catholics know Jesus was the most pro-life person who ever walked the earth - so we try to love life as he did - without limits, walls or thick scabs of cynicism. Anger and judgment just gets in the way of things and reveals to us in a very real way that we're way off course. We want to give away our lives every day. We want to die to ourselves to promote joy in others. Truly, we do.

We chase holiness. Not happiness. We covet our deposits of faith because they were passed from the lips of Jesus Christ to the ears of our first stumbling, awkward pope, who passed Christ's words on to 10 of his closest friends who were killed to help keep his teachings intact. Skin strippings, upside-down crucifixions, maulings and the rest of the agonies could not put a halt to this budding faith. There was too much glory and love in it.

So like a world-class 4×400 relay team, the early church fathers, martyrs, converted sinners and mushrooming band of followers managed to pass it forward to a jolted,

saucer-eyed world that seemed to grasp that this new way offered a peace the world simply could not give.

Because of all this, faithful Catholics face each day like it's our last on earth. And I don't think we resemble some sort of burned out Branch-Davidian cult in the process. We're sidled up next to you in the Harp and Thistle Pub, aligned with you in the construction trailer, commiserating about your forklift that's spewing transmission fluid all over the freshly-poured concrete slab. We love people, pure and simple. Even the ones who don't love us. Even the ones who hate us. There was a time I used to pray for the conversion of Bin Laden. I know, nuts.

We don't hate a president who bathes the White House in rainbow. We just chuckle, because we know that although he's evolved, God hasn't.

A good Catholic attempts to offer his every action throughout his day as a gift of love to God. That's called chasing holiness. And here's the really crappy part about that: the more we chase it, the more we realize what gigantic sinners we are. Even still, we persist. God flies to me; so I fly to him.

Here's the real reason I'm writing now: the Catholic Church has got a big problem today - not so much about the predictable Supreme Court decision, but about the church's very soul.

Here's the way I've been thinking about it the past few days. There are now four Catholic camps:

Camp A

The pious camp that hangs with a fairly inclusive set of other Catholics. They know the catechism, spend much of their time around the parish where they are active. They pray throughout the day, read Scripture, attend daily Mass as often as possible and stay close to the sacraments. All of their friends, or the great majority anyway,

are like-minded, orthodox Catholics.

Camp B

All of the aforementioned minus the pious part. When not hanging at men's/women's groups or helping with a ministry or outreach, they engage a culture they deem has broken its moral compass. They understand revealed truth so they know there are malformed consciences obliging an odd, new secular religion. They are happy, sinful soldiers. Warriors. They pray frequently because they know it's their umbilical cord to his graces.

Camp C

The Catholics who attend Mass each Sunday, pray fairly regularly and stay close to the sacraments. However, they don't participate much at their parish and are reticent to share their faith in the public square.

Camp D

The old cafeteria types, who pick what they want. They color their Facebook photo with rainbows because they don't judge. Besides, if two people love each other, who are they to say what's what? They may think certain parts of the culture are getting out of hand, "but what can they do about it?" They just want to be happy and have others be happy. On vacation, they don't for a second think about the local Catholic Church come Sunday morning. They rarely pray as a family, and seldom discuss their faith at home or in public. But they love Jesus a lot.

Because so many bishops and priests have done a poor job equipping their faithful for this tsunami of secularism that has seemingly overnight arrived on their shores, the already-enormous swath of Catholics that have devolved into "Camp D" will assuredly grow. So many of the Catholic singles in the Millennial Generation (people born from the early 1980s to the 2000s) are as well catechized as that German Shepherd down the street that barks too loudly at night.

Dozens of Catholic families die each day in America. Where once Jesus talked of seeking the one lost sheep, the numbers have flipped. Some bishops and priests don't seem to know what to do. Because of their many years of lacking courage, many of their parishioners now have no courage. And tragically, they have little knowledge of how to confront this new world of warped triune virtue: tolerance, acceptance and happy spirituality.

Three times at the very end, Jesus told Peter, his first pope: "Feed my sheep." Thank God, some very good priests made an unflinching decision early in their vocation to do so. They are now today's leaders. And thank God - because it's core-drilled into our nature - people still continue to rise up and follow strong leadership. These priests (and God's graces) are our only hope. Wise, strong bishops - the ones with Peter's heart and a shepherd's soul - are our leaders as well.

And perhaps this may lend a hand, too:

By their heroic witness and encouragement, "Group B" Catholics need to pull in the folks from "Group A", "C" and "D". And one by one - a long time from now, of course - the Catholic Church will again resemble the Catholic Church that gladly shed blood. Paradoxically, each in the long line of martyrs smiled before being eaten alive by wild packs of animals. Of course "Group B" folks know suffering's in store, but I think most are equipped and will be smiling as they arise from bed tomorrow.

"Group B" will pray more than ever, begging God for wisdom, increased love, charity, courage and continued mercy. They will still chase holiness. And more than ever before, they will engage everywhere, sharing their Catholic faith in the most venomous places or maybe even in a bank line or a barbershop.

A priest was spat on by a few men in a Pride march in New York City the other day. The priest said he probably deserved worse. He's a "Group B" guy.

Today, perhaps more than ever, “Group B” folks know they have to fly to Christ, to crave him. To kneel at the start and end of each day. And in between, they know their life has to be a living prayer. They will examine their consciences daily. Their wills will be sharpened to fight off sloth and sin because they know hypocrites make for awful evangelists. They will become more contemplative. They will talk less. Their sinful habits will decrease. And they will become holier because of the fierce graces that course through their bloodstream.

And because of all this, when juiced-up progressives call them bigots, haters and worse, they’ll know internally – in a very real way – that beneath their veneer, layer after layer after layer, will lie love.

Just love.

And that’s what will help them walk into this culture.

Weird, huh?

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