

Birth Pains

'This child will be a stumbling block, causing some to fall and others to rise in Israel; He will be a sign that divides and reveals the hearts of many. Your heart, Mary, will be pierced as well.' (LK 2:34, 35)

Simeon prophesies the piercings incited by the Prince of peace. Perhaps this is why the day after Christmas we celebrate the Church's first martyr, St. Stephen; having barely mediated upon Jesus' birth, we honor the cruel death of one who embodied Christ by forgiving his murderers as they pelted him with stones (Acts 7).

What further unites this birth and death is the angelic countenance shared by Stephen in his witness (Act 6:15) unto death and Jesus in His birth. The crib points always to the Cross, Jesus' and our little ones, His Presence our radiant hope amid suffering endured for and through Him.

A particular suffering increasing among faithful families at Christmas is the 'coming out' of members who now insist upon their 'gay' self or marriage (or some gender-bending variant). That is often the 'gift' these ones offer their bewildered loved ones on holidays. A friend described the devastation wrought by a lame relative who now insists that he is a woman; he showed up for Christmas dinner in drag and disoriented all present, especially his 90-year-old grandmother. Another friend shared with me mournfully how his entire family-of-origin refused to speak to him (let alone gather with him) at Christmas due to his refusal to attend his mother's 'gay' wedding. Yet another, a father of four children just discovered he is sharing his wife this Christmas with another woman, a relationship she has no intention of giving up.

I have only mercy for persons in sexual conflict, and believe that all must exercise free will in regards to what they do with those conflicts; that, however, does not make every choice good. I have mercy mixed with holy fear for persons who resolve their conflicts by asserting an identity, and exercising versions of friendship and marriage that defies the Creator and Redeemer of all.

However, my greatest ache lies for the family members who are given a brittle 'embrace me or else' verdict by loved ones who come under a dispensation distinct from Christian orthodoxy. These families are being asked to exchange their views on creation, redemption, and love for alien beliefs. Justice for all? 'Coming out' may be better described as a profoundly selfish act.

Christian love means we agree with what is honorable, and have the courage to disagree with poor decisions our loved ones make while mercifully bearing with them. Many of my friends are not even free to bear with their members, having been written off as intolerant, haters, etc. They are experiencing a new kind of stoning, a fulfillment of Jesus' words when He said: 'From now on, there will be five in one family divided against each other...father against son and son against father, mother against daughter...' (LK 12:52, 53)

Jesus is willing to break hearts in order to heal them; He may even divide the faithful from members who are offended by Him. May we welcome His peace in our pierced hearts.

T.S. Eliot writes in the last stanza of 'Journey of the Magi':

Were we led all that way for
Birth or Death? There was birth, certainly,
We had evidence and no doubt. I have seen birth and death,
But had thought they were different; this Birth was
Hard and bitter agony for us, like Death, our death.
We returned to our places, these Kingdoms,
But no longer at ease here, in the old dispensation,
With an alien people clutching their gods.
I should be glad of another death.