

Shepherdless?

'When Jesus saw the crowd, He had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd' (MK 6:34).

If the wise-men are any example, then Epiphany is about the worship of Jesus manifesting itself in loving people most in need of it. Our new neighborhood is full of possibilities, including a rainbow house full of gender-benders, sweet and clueless as to the purpose of their sexuality. I ask Jesus to help me show them His love. He is faithful. The other day I helped one housemate change a tire. I pray for them always, awaiting the chance to know and love them more; I believe that the King of heaven wants to dwell there and embrace any willing heart among them.

They have no guides, just a string of well-intentioned, misdirected relationships (if the revolving door of tenants is any indication). And I wonder; how are our churches inclined to welcome and shepherd them into true happiness?

I keep going back to a disturbing article I read in the New York Times last month about the mess our Church is in concerning 'good news' for the LGBT+ set. It seems Bishop Robert McElroy of San Diego wants to reach gender-benders but has lost his way; this Catholic shepherd of the tenth biggest city in the USA allowed a 'gay-married' man (we'll call him Steve) to pastor a parish in the thick of the 'gay' community there. The priest overseeing Steve got promoted, leaving Steve to do the job. The effect was disastrous: a man redefining/defying Catholic marriage and sexual ethics taught 'gay'-seekers accordingly, thereby presenting a Gospel falsified by cheap grace.

Worst still, reactionary persons hurled all kinds of at poor Steve, who although deceived (and deceiving) did not deserve the slurs and even life threats he received for his service. First and foremost, Steve is a man under authority, and his authority is Bishop McElroy. I ascribe primary blame to the good bishop for putting a man on the firing line who shouldn't have been there.

The greater problem? A brand of traditionalism that has no vision or authority to welcome persons into Jesus' Church in a way that is merciful, mighty, and transformational. If the article is correct (and few are, entirely), many of the 'faithful' opposed to Steve acted as if LGBT+ reality had more power than Jesus Christ to define His Church. They responded with a fearful, vengeful spirit rather than with a robust Gospel that declares to all who seek: 'The time has come—the Kingdom of God is near; repent and believe in the Gospel!' (MK 1:15) In this, every Christian is a shepherd in the Spirit of Jesus Christ, called by Him to bear witness of the One who takes us as we are then shakes us down to our very foundations in order to establish a new creation.

Sexual ethics in light of King Jesus? Forego your lovers, and faddish self-assessments! He gives all and demands nothing less of us. Only the Gospel, empowered by the Spirit and declared through broken, blessed people like us, can make Him known in a way that commands repentance.

Shepherds confuse today: guides driven by a worldly, feel-good Gospel (McElroy) or by traditional exclusionary attitudes that frighten off rebels. Conservatives cannot afford the latter! Either we cultivate merciful vision and passion for persons caught in a web of lies or we will be spit out of Jesus' mouth for upholding a form of godliness but denying its power to transform lives (2 Tim. 3:5; Col. 2: 20-23).

That must be our call—every one of us standing in the gap as a pretty good under-'shepherd', praying for and inviting the hurting into holy family.

“I will search for the lost and bring back the strays. I will bind up the injured and strengthen the weak, but the sleek and the strong I will destroy. I will shepherd the flock with justice,' declares the Sovereign Lord.” (Ezekiel 34:16)

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