



The Call to Come Out

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The Gospel: John 11:1-45

Joshua Gamson, Professor of Sociology at the University of San Francisco, writes in his book, *The Fabulous Sylvester*, that by 1975 San Francisco was to gay men and lesbians what Israel was to Jews, only with fewer wars and more parties. San Francisco was where you went to come out and be gay.

Last year when the BBC broadcast their service from Most Holy Redeemer Parish, Maggie read a short version of today's gospel where Jesus tells Lazarus to "come out." It is the only place in the gospels where Jesus tells someone to come out. And at that service I said that paradoxically it is here at MHR that I have learned that there is a sense in which coming out is actually for everyone and not just for gay people.

For it is not only gays that need to come out of the tombs of our own making in this life. As Elizabeth Stuart says, we need to listen to Jesus call us out of our tombs and speak the truth of who we really are. The Lenten journey is to listen to and respond to Jesus who invites each of us to take off the shrouds that keep us from being ourselves before God and each other.

It may come slowly or quite unexpectedly and suddenly, this realization that you are entombed but need not be; this realization that what you thought was evil, corrupting, life denying, is in fact, good, liberating and life giving.

Many of us here at Most Holy Redeemer, straight parishioners and, in a particular way of course, gay parishioners, have coming out stories. Each coming out is unique, each one a story of grace. Each one a story of how in your particular circumstances and life you responded to Jesus calling you out; moving from hiding into the light, from unfreedom to freedom.

Bill Huebsch sees the process by which LGBTQ Christians journey to greater and deeper union with God as similar to Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead:

Lesbians and gay men will tell you that the truth is this: sexuality is a gift from God and homosexuality is one expression of that gift. That's the truth that has set so many lesbians and gay men free at last. And in this coming out gay men and lesbians often say that, for the first time, it is now clear how God touches us with eternal truth.

There are those who would prefer that the stone not be removed from the tomb for fear of the stench. And coming out is a process, a painful one often, and as with Lazarus it involves the support of all those who help unbind us.

A couple of years ago, here at Most Holy Redeemer parish Fr James Alison was asked about the place of gay people in the Catholic Church:

It's up to us. Are we going to allow ourselves to be given this new life? Moving from creation to new creation means working out together what the shape of holiness of life and of heart is for us as gay and lesbian Catholics. It means noting with joy that we are now closer than ever to being able to imagine that a rejoicing gay heart and a rejoicing Catholic heart can be the same heart, and a normal and healthy and holy thing.

At Most Holy Redeemer we are blessed with parishioners of every sexual orientation. And in a special way we are blessed to be at the center of this conversation and movement of the spirit. We should not be surprised that sometimes we can still smell the stench of the tomb. Our invitation today is to respond to Jesus' call to come out, as individuals and as a community. Together we can unbind each other's grave clothes. Together, then, we can let go of all that has us tangled up in death and live the new life Jesus promises us.