



June 2024

Dear Friends,

As has been my custom the last two years, BCC'd on this email are members of our St. Mary's parish family who have shared with me something of your life in DC's LGBT community. Again I want to share my gratitude *with* you and *for* you this June... with you because I'm so honored and privileged that you would open your lives and your hearts to me as your priest; for you because each of you brings an experience of Christ to the wider life of the parish. I begin drafting this *epistle* a little earlier than usual, on Trinity Sunday. This year's parish meditations on the solemnity spring from St. Paul's words to the first Christian generation in Rome: *For those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you received a spirit of adoption, through whom we cry "Abba," Father. (Rm. 8:14-17)*

I don't know that we give the Spirit His due credit/attention in this regard: the Holy Spirit frees the baptized from fear. A brother priest once opined, "90% of human responses are based on fear and suffering." It makes sense if you think about it. Nature equips us with a fight or flight response. Pauline theology reminds us that the entire Old Covenant, in fact, while in contact with God, still builds on the fundamental foundation of fear and pedagogical correction; unchanged really until the coming of Christ. What's the *Jesus difference*? He reveals to us that the Father loves us... that the Son becomes one with us, experiencing even death for love of us... that together the Father and Son send us the substance of their love: the Holy Spirit. Making us collaborators in the internal dynamic of God, this Spirit, this *God-love* as -it were- liberates us from fear. Thus freed we find we can more readily pursue growth and change, ever intent on our goal, *achieving the full stature of Christ (Eph 4:13)*. Two stories come to mind *a propos* of this conversation.

The first story is linked [HERE](#) a [*Washington*] *Post Reports* podcast from 7 May about Pope Francis' friendship with an Italian trans sex-worker. The subject of the story has had a hard life, and during covid, out of work, faced both an HIV infection and Cancer. She heard that a parish priest on the docks outside Rome was giving out food. Meeting her the priest learned about her many life difficulties and those of her friends. He began connecting them with social services, often associated with the Italian Church. As recipients of Church charity, these folks were invited to meet the Holy Father, who embraced them. The news media noted this as revolutionary, extraordinary, but as a priest I saw it as simple: Love. Any human person, whatever his/her circumstances, deserves Love.. and while the grand international stage of a papal audience draws special attention, the Pope's actions and those of the priest struck me as just what's expected of us, not as clergy but as Christians. That said, I wanted to give the *Post* reporters their due and spend more time thinking about this encounter.

Those whose minds remain rooted primarily in the natural (i.e. the pre-Holy Spirit) world, including even Catholics who may ignore dimensions of their own identity and sacramental grace, will function according to fallen nature. In our fallen natural world, difference always equals 'cause for caution,' and thus fear. It cannot be denied and implies no judgement to say that statistically speaking a trans sex-worker has had a very different life than the rest of the general population. But this Trinity

Sunday, we are called *not to receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear*. Having received the HOLY Spirit, moving beyond the merely natural, adopted into the Love of the Trinity, and calling out, with Jesus, *Abba Father*, it should be the most normal thing in the world for us all to extend loving kindness to each other whatever our differences. As a result of the priest's kindness and that of the Holy Father, the woman in the story has returned to the practice of the Church and continues her journey through life, no longer alone, but embraced by her Catholic family.

The Second story comes from an ongoing conversation I've been having here in DC with a non-parishioner who stopped in seeking a priest. I love those conversations because they're usually very Holy Spirit inspired... and with the Spirit in charge, amazing things happen. I share the story with permission. This man in his 40s - call him "Clark"- reported feeling really down. Further conversation refined this to a fear of loneliness... as in life-loneliness. I said it was not uncommon these days: most Americans are dissatisfied with the number of close friends they have and it's hard to meet that special someone in DC. Clark then explained that he identifies as gay. He's been trying to meet people -as many these days do- on dating apps but feels no satisfaction from his encounters. "I just feel *disposable*." (His word, *disposable*). Over the course of our ongoing dialog, I've learned more about his life. Clark described his family background as (again, his word) *cold*. He has no particular religious affiliation, never baptized, and has never been a 'joiner.' He socializes with other members of the general LGBT community here in DC. Knocking on the rectory door was a desperate act. Recently we had a breakthrough.

I asked Clark if he felt *unloveable*. In a popular society where we frequently hear, "It's all good," and everyone seems hyper-focused on positive feelings, safe spaces, affirmation, etc., it may seem odd suggesting that anyone feels unlovable. Indeed, Clark was afraid even to go there, but he chewed on the idea between conversations: resulting from disposable hookup culture, social life surrounded by others but never close to anyone, and an adolescence of distant parenting he was afraid that (a) he was unlovable and (b) it was somehow his fault. Our dialog has a long way to go... I hope he sticks with it, but I told him that here at St Mary's there's only love... that there could be chances for wonderful friendships, and that no one would ever dispose of him. Of course the greatest seal for that understanding would be full sacramental participation in church life... whereby the Spirit would aid Clark in a new self-understanding... one free from fear, couched in the internal Love of God himself... But we're not there yet. I hope we may be one day.

Dear Friends, we are surrounded by the natural world. Never forget that you have - by baptism and confirmation- already begun living beyond that world. Do not return to *a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear*. Whatever has happened, you are loved and lovable... not in the disposable 'left/right swiping' way of the world... not for your age, or looks, or what you can do for someone else, but at the level of your very being, now touched by the divine. DEMAND *that LOVE* from the world!! Know that as you walk in the *Holy Spirit of adoption, through whom we cry Abba Father*, your fathers at the altar will always be here for you.

Your priest,

*Fr Vincent De Rosa*