

Pastoral Council
Thoughts for Reflection
June 26, 2016

Conversion by Love

Florida Bishop Lynch made about the worst possible remark after the devastating attack on an Orlando nightclub: "Sadly it is religion, including our own, which targets... and often breeds contempt for gays... which can ultimately lead to violence."

In one breath he equates the love of Jesus Christ with the warlike doctrine of Mohammed, and blames the Church for the deaths of gay men and women. Neither of those things is true.

Where Islam's doctrine approves conversion by the sword, Christianity converts by love. The love the Church teaches is first the love of God, and second, the love of fellow man. Without knowing the love of God in the first place, one cannot understand how to love mankind correctly, for it requires a supernatural love that gives up its life for another.

I read a moving article by a man who had lived a profoundly disordered lifestyle in San Francisco before he became a Catholic. His name is Joseph Sciambra. In response to Bishop Lynch, Mr. Sciambra wrote, "to some extent, the Church has contributed to the eventual death of some gay men and women, but not in the way this Bishop from Florida is proposing. For, it is in the laxity of (and abandonment of) Catholic teachings, not in their imagined harshness, that the Church is complicit."

When the deaths of too many of his friends in the Castro district led him to try to escape the lifestyle, Joseph sought out a Catholic priest. After explaining to him everything he had been through and why he wanted to change, the priest "let out a sigh and said: 'But, you were born gay, that's where you belong.'"

Now, I am trying to imagine if I went to a priest and told him I have been an adulterer, and he said "You were born that way, that's where you belong." Or a thief, or an abortionist, a liar, a cheat, a womanizer, a pornographer – and was told, "You were born that way." Righteous anger does not begin to describe the way I feel about that priest's advice. One simply cannot be in love with God and condone sin at the same time.

Strong and clear teaching about good and evil, repentance and conversion, will provide a lasting path to rising above our baser instincts. Ambiguous teaching, born from a misguided sense of compassion, only pushes the sinner back into the cycle of need and despair. We show our love for our fellow man, among other ways, by helping him become holy, not by helping him become a happier sinner.

As Love Himself said, *Go and sin no more*. Joseph Scambria asks, "Is there anyone brave enough to show us the way?"