

We will be judged on love, not sexuality

Is there a topic more difficult to write about than homosexuality? One has only to mention the word in an opinion piece and the defense systems of homophobes and homosexuals alike are activated.

This column (a foray into a place "where angels fear to tread") is prompted by two recent news items: a study commissioned by the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force on changing American attitudes toward homosexuals, and Cardinal John O'Connor's condemnation at St. Patrick's Cathedral of a proposal before the New York City Council to make domestic partners the legal equals of married couples.

The study discloses a steep rise over the past 20 years in public support for equal rights for gays and lesbians in housing, employment and the military, although the level of disapproval of homosexuality itself remains high — at 56 percent. Indeed, gays and lesbians are among the least-liked groups in the United States.

Alan Wolfe, a professor at Boston University and author of *One Nation, After All* (Viking, 1998), describes this combination of public support for equal rights and disapproval of homosexuality as "the soft homophobic position." He reports that many Americans who support the legal rights of gays and lesbians nevertheless reject the claim that a homosexual life style is "the



essays in theology

BY FATHER RICHARD P. MCBRIEN

moral equivalent" of a heterosexual one.

Cardinal O'Connor's statement came in a homily in his cathedral late last month. He said the city council's proposal to grant the same legal rights to domestic partners as to married couples is a direct assault on the institution of marriage itself, which, he suggested, is grounded in "natural moral law and Western tradition." His "reflection," as he called it, drew a burst of applause from the congregation, largely tourists. However, many later told the *New York Times* that they were "dazed" by the length of the homily and "confused" by its subject. Some thought the cardinal was talking about unwed mothers.

Although Cardinal O'Connor insisted he'd spoken "with love, judging no one," the overall effect was strongly negative within the gay and lesbian community.

According to the *Times*, the passage of the New York City bill is guaranteed because of the backing of two Catholic politicians, Mayor Rudolph Giuliani, a Republican, and Council Speaker Peter Vallone, a Democrat. Last month, the Philadelphia City Council passed a similar bill over the strong objection of Cardinal Anthony Bevilacqua, archbishop of Philadelphia.

The two cardinals' opposition to such bills is typical of the stance many Catholic bishops have taken on this and other issues related to homosexuality. The inordinate attention given to the matter in our time is in some contrast to the first Christian century, when the percentage of homosexuals in society was at least as large.

In only one instance St. Paul identified homosexuality as a vice (Romans 1:27), and, remarkably, there are no recorded words attributed to Jesus on the subject. But in today's church there is a multitude of questions and concerns about it.

Is homosexuality an intrinsically disordered moral state? Is the church obliged to try to "convert" homosexuals to a heterosexual life style? Can homosexuals be ordained? Is it licit for active homosexuals to use condoms rather than risk contracting AIDS? Is the church ever justified in recommending this lesser-of-two-evils course? Is the church morally obliged to oppose

laws that are designed to protect the civil rights of gays and lesbians? According to the psychologist and prolific Catholic author Eugene Kennedy, while most people ask, "What does the Catholic Church teach about homosexuality," the deeper, more pertinent question is, "What does the Catholic Church teach about intimacy?" (*National Catholic Reporter*, 1/18/98).

Intimacy, he insists, pertains to the quality of our relationships. It has to do with our capacity to love another, selflessly and generously, without manipulation.

"A homosexual genuinely reaching out to a companion saves his life no matter the erotic dimensions of the relationship," Kennedy wrote. "A heterosexual holding himself back as coldly as an uncashed check in a relationship loses his life no matter his pride at being straight."

Whether homosexual or heterosexual, we are judged, in the end, by our capacity to forget ourselves and our own needs and to "break through the shell of (our) narcissistic confinement to respond lovingly to somebody else."

Isn't this the message the church ought to be preaching from its pulpits — "with love, judging no one"?

Father McBrien is a professor of theology at the University of Notre Dame.

The cross should be a blessing for our journey

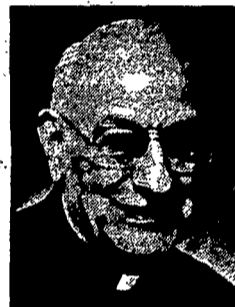
Sunday's Readings: (R3) Luke 9:51-62. (R1) 1 Kings 19:16, 19-21. (R2) Galatians 5:1, 13-18.

The Sunday Gospel narrates the last journey of Jesus from Galilee to Jerusalem. He was going there to die and through his death on the cross to return to the Father.

St. Luke put it this way: "As the time approached when Jesus was to be taken from this world, he firmly resolved to proceed toward Jerusalem." Jesus had a job to do and he would do it no matter the cost. In fact, he was so eager to do it that he took a short cut to Jerusalem. He went by way of Samaria, not the roundabout way east of the Jordan River.

We too are on a journey to God. Our journey also is by way of the cross, for the disciple is not above the master. Like Jesus we should let nothing get in our way, even though it may be a cross. For so many the cross is a stumbling block.

The secret to success in life is simply keep on keeping on. Henry Jamieson was a legendary hardware salesman back in the 1940s. When he was asked how many calls he would make on a prospect before giving up, he replied, "It depends which one of us dies first." Jamieson is reputed



a word for sunday

BY FATHER ALBERT SHAMON

to have called on one prospect 125 times before getting an order.

People often fail because they quit too soon. Good things happen when we hang in there and will not be defeated. This is especially true when our cause is just and our goals are lofty.

Jesus was so resolved to get to Jerusalem that he used the shortcut through Samaria. In Samaria, however, Jesus did not get the red-carpet treatment. He was unwelcome. James and John, the sons of thunder, wanted Jesus to rain down fire upon Samaria's cities as Elijah once did on his enemies. But Jesus reprimanded them. They were not only to be determined and decisive, but tolerant and caring, not vindictive.

Eventually, Jesus' kindness paid off. Sev-

en years after the Ascension this same John went with Peter to send down the fire of the Holy Spirit upon the Samaritans through the sacrament of confirmation. They were the first non-Jews to be received into the church. Love conquers all things, and a mild answer breaketh wrath.

Jesus stated three conditions for discipleship.

First, he plainly stated that to follow him demands sacrifice. Foxes have lairs, the birds nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head. Winston Churchill mastered England against Hitler by promising only "blood, sweat and tears." We bless ourselves with the sign of the cross to remind ourselves that the cross is a blessing when accepted.

Second, Jesus wants us to answer his summons immediately. To dillydally with God's graces is to lose them. Third, Jesus warned his disciples not to look back. You can't make a straight furrow if you don't keep looking ahead.

In the early days of the church, countless people lost their lives as martyrs for Jesus. They would not turn their back on Christ. Their firmness drew others to the faith, so that it was said, the blood of martyrs is a seed.

Perpetua, a native of North Africa, was

just 21 when imprisoned for being a follower of Christ. Twice her father came to jail and begged her to renounce her faith. He was from a noble, well-connected family, and he could have freed her if she would cooperate. Though it broke her heart to refuse him, she held fast. She was gored by wild animals and finally beheaded. How far will we go for Christ?

Father Shamon is administrator of St. Isaac Jogues Chapel, Fleming.

Daily Readings

Monday, June 29
Acts 12:1-11; 2 Timothy 4:6-8, 17-18; Matthew 16:13-19

Tuesday, June 30
Amos 3:1-8, 4:11-12; Matthew 8:23-27

Wednesday, July 1
Amos 5:14-15, 21-24; Matthew 8:28-34

Thursday, July 2
Amos 7:10-17; Matthew 9:1-8

Friday, July 3
Ephesians 2:19-22; John 20:24-29

Saturday, July 4
Amos 9:11-15; Matthew 9:14-17

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