

Moving Towards Advent, 2009

The days are mellowing in St. Louis, despite the wonderful fact of sunny 70-degree temperatures in these early days of November. We have recently ordained two new priests in our Great Waters Region of Roman Catholic Womenpriests – Alta Jacko in Chicago on November 10 and our own Marybeth McBryan in St. Louis on All Saints Day, November 1. We are celebrating a rash of birthdays and anniversaries within our Therese community as we move through this autumn season, not least of which will be the second anniversary of our founding as we begin a new liturgical year on the First Sunday of Advent. It is a time for introspection and reflection: the who, what, when, where and why of Therese of Divine Peace; and of priests who identify themselves as Roman Catholic when they are women, or men who are married or gay or physically challenged.

Who? Women and men; young, old and in-between; white and black; students, working, retired and disabled; comfortable and poor; married and single, widowed and divorced, partnered and celibate; straight, gay, and lesbian; democrat and republican; liberal and conservative; Catholic and non. We are, in other words, a microcosm of society.

But we of Therese are lacking children; and immigrants; and persons of *many* colors. We, in St. Louis and around the country, are lacking the alienated; and the unchurched; and persons who “support us” in absentia. We are lacking those who are afraid to be here; and those who can’t be here because of others who would be hurt if they were.

What? Roman Catholic. But thinking and doing; inclusive and welcoming; non-dogmatic and non-judgmental; living justly, loving tenderly, walking humbly with our God; and with each other; and with all others, to the best of our ability; reformers, renewers, rebuilders.

But we are lacking those who profess these same beliefs but continue to support the “good ole boys” system; and those who say they don’t believe in what we’re doing but haven’t bothered to find out what that is; and those who don’t know we’re here, or don’t know we’re *still* here.

When? NOW. Now is the time for renewal, and “they” know it. That they know it is obvious in their retrenchment into the medieval church of pre-Vatican II, as they pay off exorbitant pedophilia “settlements” and talk about everything that is “wrong” within the church *except* the elephant in the room: as they close parishes and schools, especially in our inner cities, and abandon the immigrants, the poor, the children; as they welcome the narrow-minded who pass judgment against the LGBT community and women, especially women bishops and priests; as they interrogate the religious women who wash feet and work for justice.

But we are lacking those who say it isn't time yet; and those who say we need to wait for the "church," aka, the good ole boys, to approve us; and those who just plain say we are not worthy to serve in priestly ministry because we have the "wrong" genitalia.

Where? Wherever we are. In the Central West End of St. Louis; in Festus; in Kansas City MO and Quincy IL; across these United States, and Canada, and Europe, and the whole earthly world; in churches, and homes, and empty storefronts, and even flea markets – wherever we are invited in, welcomed, able to form community. We are missionaries, companions on the journey. And *all* are welcome.

But we overall are lacking space, time, numbers, monetary resources. We are stretched thin. And we are lacking those whose call to ordination does not include a call to reformation; and those who believe their call to reformation needs to include a call to ordination in order to "sign on" with us.

Why? From what has come before, the why is obvious. It is absolutely necessary in order to bring about the renewal and reform that will save our church from the self-destruction that comes at the hands of greed and corruption and absolute power. Perhaps "why?" should be rephrased. Why not? Why not now? Why not here, and there, and everywhere? Why not you, and you, and all of us?

As long as some of our sisters and brothers are missing, we are not whole. They are not whole. The church is not whole. The world is not whole. So as we move towards Advent, and into our third year as Therese of Divine Peace, we do not rest on our laurels. We have indeed come a long way on our shared journey, as a community and as a reform movement – but we have, oh, so far to go.

May our Holy God, who is truly *beyond* all names, continue to bless us on The Way.