

Homily delivered by Bob Anthony, Dignity/New York's Pride Liturgy – June 28th 2014

Readings: Ephesians 2: 19-22, Pacem In Terris, Chapter 1, St. John XXIII, John 17: 20-26

“You are no longer aliens or foreign visitors; you are citizens like all the Saints – And part of God’s household.”

One can only wonder what the effort of these words of Paul had on the Ephesians to whom they were written – Ephesians – Gentile outcasts long thought to be excluded from God’s covenant with Israel. Scripture does not tell us – but does offer a parallel story in Acts 10 where Peter visits the home of Cornelius, a devout Gentile. James Alison, in his book, *On Being Liked*, describes the scene. You remember the story – Peter had bizarre dreams seemingly telling him to eat all sorts of vile foods forbidden by the purity code. He arrives at Cornelius’ house inwardly perplexed as to what to do and is asked to tell the story of Jesus. Alison relates that this was disconcerting for Peter – who assumed this story was only for the benefit of the Jewish people. Peter had to – in Alison’s words – undergo a stomach churning disorientation – losing the sense of goodness and holiness which comes from being separate – in order to even imagine that the story might have anything to do with these Gentiles – Yet even before Peter had finished telling the story the Holy Spirit fell on all who heard the word – causing Peter more disorientation. For that a Holy story should be told to a group of impure people as something confrontational something to make them feel bad about themselves so they might repent – this is perfectly comprehensible. But that is not what happens – rather than being confronted and downcast, the listeners all find themselves overwhelmed from within with a source of delight. Before this – the story had always been – “God delights in the ‘purity’ of the chosen people, and hates the impurity of the other nations – but here we see the dawning realization that God actually likes the impure people – that God wants them to be on the inside of God’s story – Just as they are. God is not confronting them to get them to repent – or even inviting them to become something else. God is rather possessing them with delight – and they are delighting in being possessed.

Tonight, as we look back 2,000 years to when these scriptures were written, we note with sadness that somehow the message reverted to the original story – chosen and impure – confrontational – intended to make the others – especially LGBT others, feel bad about themselves. The dawning realization that God actually likes LGBT people – that God wants them on the inside of God’s story – Just as they are – came not so long ago.

And so tonight we celebrate the fact, that in 1969 after centuries in which it was impossible for LGBT people to find a place in salvation history – to find themselves in God’s story - The Spirit of our Loving God descended in an unlikely place just a few blocks from here. “You are no longer aliens or foreign visitors – you are citizens like all the Saints – this message – though not these exact words – were transmitted lovingly, in word and song and dance by Judy Garland to a bunch of Drag Queens – who were uplifted by this message of love and respect. And they loved her back. So when Judy Garland died, and the Drag Queens who attended her funeral returned to the Stonewall Bar to both mourn and celebrated their loving relationship with her – It was – we can say definitively with 45 years of hindsight

– Definitely not a good moment to stage a harassing police raid – But God works in wonderful ways – and the Gay Liberation Movement was born.

Tomorrow, tens of thousands will proudly march by that bar, and included among them will be hundreds of proud out police men and women – for liberation always frees not only the oppressed, but also the oppressors. Tonight we also celebrate and commemorate the formation of Dignity NY – this community of faith – in 1972, led by John McNeil, one of our founders, and the author of the groundbreaking book, *The Church and the Homosexual*, this community was a prominent and early voice for liberation and justice. Very early on Dignity's Regional Board (NY and NJ) unanimously opposed NAMBLA's inclusion in the Gay Pride March – a position that was initially derided by Heritage of Pride leaders – “We do not exclude anyone from the Parade” they said to me when I advanced this position at a Heritage of Pride meeting in Albany – Yet I was never prouder to be part of this organization then when, at meeting's end, several young college students approached me and thanked me for Dignity's position. And that position ultimately prevailed – NAMBLA was banned from marching, our young people respected and protected, and the rest of us can march and celebrate more fully without the embarrassment of NAMBLA's presence. Thanks in no small part to Dignity. Many other acts of love and justice have been carried out by this community – too many to mention, but including Prison and AIDS Ministries. Some of our members were prominent facilitators in events that led to the historic Windsor decision of the US Supreme Court – a decision still reverberating throughout the land. It's almost like a July 4th fireworks celebration – you dare not look away for fear of missing one – US Embassy in London hosts NYC Gay Men's Chorus with cocktail reception – hangs rainbow flags and banners for first time in history – Yonkers, YONKERS! Has city hall ceremony – proclamation – hangs rainbow flag for last week of June – there goes Indiana – and Utah – UTAH! All this in the last week = All this we commemorate – and celebrate. And we are grateful.

Grateful to all those who have gone before us – paving the way for our liberation – in this community and out – from Stonewell to Fr. Ned Coughlin – to all those who advance the cause of LGBT liberation. But most of all, we are grateful to Our Loving God whose words of love and acceptance once again are heard – “You are no longer aliens or foreign visitors, you are citizens like all the Saints – and part of God's household.”

Please bow your head and join me in prayer:

We pray, God of Love, that those words of yours e shouted from the rooftops of the world, heard, understood, delighted in, from North Carolina to North Korea, in Uganda and Russia and the Middle East – in all the churches and synagogues and mosques of the world – May they bring liberation and delight to all – oppressed and oppressor alike. And may you, our Lover God, who has so blessed this community and its members in Your Liberating Love, continue to bless us by using us in the world of liberation for all your children. Amen.