

Happy 38th Anniversary Dignity New York. Quite the accomplishment for our community!

This year our 38th anniversary celebration began with Our Pride Liturgy theme, **Celebrating the Priesthood of All Believers**. On June 26, in this holy place, over 120 people were welcomed at the door and presented a rainbow stole proclaiming, “We are celebrating the Priesthood of All Believers”.

Our liturgy began with the Pride Proclamation announcing... “Tonight is the night, we gather as a community of individuals, working together to welcome the oppressed, exiled and excluded, to touch the poor and suffering, heal the sick, and care for the homebound and forgotten.”

Our history is well known to us. During the past 38 years, Dignity responded to the Gay community in New York and throughout the world. The first meeting convened in response to an ad in the Village Voice with over 200 people attending the October 25th meeting. Since then some of our ministries included Bailey House, National Prison Ministry, Sunday afternoon Tea at St Vincent’s, publishing Insight, answering the LINKLINE phones, our TV show and informational outreach to the Gay community.

How things have changed after the Halloween letter in 1986 when the Vatican released its infamous Letter. Dignity’s last mass at St. Francis Xavier was March 7, 1987. 23 years have passed since we were led out in exile from St Francis. Just this last week, our brothers and sisters in the Dignity San Antonio Chapter suffered the same fate of expulsion from a Catholic Church where they have worshiped for many years. Over the years, our activism included everything from AIDS Ministry to Women’s issues. We have done this within our Dignity community strengthened by our weekly Liturgy, Social Action and Spiritual Development.

Last year at the DignityUSA Convention in San Francisco, Mary Hunt reminded us, “Let the needs of the world and not the failings of the institutional church set our agenda in the years to come.” What have we done lately?

Within the last few weeks, we stood at the foot of the Brooklyn Bridge requesting Marriage Equality; our members went to Washington DC to One Nation Working Together. We marched together to Washington Square Park to the Glow light Vigil for Tyler Clementi and the other young men who committed suicide to show other young people that they are not alone. And we wore purple on Wednesday, “Spirit Day” to spotlight the suicides committed by homosexual teens who suffered from bullying and hate crimes.

Again, we are reminded of Mary Hunt’s call, “Let the needs of the world and not the failings of the institutional church set our agenda in the years to come.”

Sometimes we are the institutional church. Sometimes we fail. We are narrow minded, afraid and regrettably too comfortable in our ways. We lack courage and wisdom and a bit of chutzpa that is needed to continue to respond to the changing world.

The Gospel today has some insight on the way we can respond to the needs of the world. The Pharisee was a great guy. He was devoutly religious, kept the ritual laws; he was politically active but unsympathetic toward those less committed. Jesus places this parable in a sense of irony comparing the Pharisee and the tax-collector at prayer. The Pharisee represented those who take pride in their religious practices and raised themselves up at the expense of others. The Pharisee prayed in a prideful boast trying to justify himself with a sense of self-satisfaction

while despising others. The Tax Collector represents those who were despised by the “religious”. The zinger, the Tax Collector humbled himself before God and begged for mercy. The Tax Collector’s prayer was heard. Through this parable, Jesus compares the attitude of humility and pride. He teaches us that humility helps us to see ourselves as we really are and we are then receptive to God’s mercy and grace.

We can become like the queen who stands before her magical mirror and ask the question, “Mirror, mirror, on the wall, who’s the fairest of them all?” Day after day she jumped to the conclusion that she was the fairest. And one day, we like her after all our prayer and fasting and marches, gay pride ribbons, stoles and good works we find out that Snow White is out there, fairer than us! It’s the attitude of the heart that God sees. When we look to God to verify our righteousness, like the queen who looked in the mirror, will we fly into a rage unable to hear the truth? Or will we be like the Tax Collector who dared not gaze into the mirror of the Eternal. Had he looked, he would have seen the gaze of a loving God pouring out a river of grace and mercy.

On our day of Judgment, God will not ask us how many prayers, masses or committee meetings we attended. God won’t care if we went to church. God won’t ask us who we are better than. God will ask, “Did we welcome the oppressed, the exiled, the excluded, did we touch the poor and suffering, did we heal the sick and care for the homebound and forgotten.”

(Pause)

Bow you head and pray with me, “God, be merciful to me a sinner.”