

WHOSE FREEDOM?

Rev. Elsie Hainz McGrath

Here in these United States, we are in the midst of yet another public Roman Catholic disaster. It is being touted as the Fortnight For Freedom. Seems the male Roman Catholic hierarchy fancies itself The Voice of Morality. Seems they even fail to see the irony in attempting to claim that this audacious political publicity stunt is all about religious freedom.

Not so, my friends. Not so. This is simply more of the same: A well-heeled all-male power-mongering worldwide organization going to any lengths to keep the women “in line” and keep the scrutiny off their own heinous sins.

Real religious freedom is being taught and encouraged to follow our consciences in making decisions related to contraception and to lifestyles, to child-bearing and to child-rearing ~ as women and men, married or single, hetero or homo or trans or bi, have been lovingly doing for these past 50 years.

Real religious freedom is being lauded for and supported in working for social justice, quality education, care of the poor and the sick, the homeless and the incarcerated ~ and all those other wonderful “Christian” endeavors our religious sisters in the LCWR have conscientiously been about for these past 250 years.

Real religious freedom is being welcoming and accepting of all people, including women at the altar, non-Catholics in communion lines, non-Christians in papal prayer circles ~ and all those others who continue to be marginalized and penalized for simply being who they are in 2012.

In truth, real religious freedom means being true to our conscience, even in the face of oppression. Ergo, when there is no respectful dialogue, or any other “legal” means of bringing about just change, there must be civil disobedience ~ or, in the case of church law, canonical disobedience. Unjust laws must be broken in order to effect just change.

The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, drawing upon the church’s teaching on the primacy of conscience, affirmed this time-honored strategy on April 12, 2012, writing: *An unjust law cannot be obeyed. In the face of an unjust law, an accommodation is not to be sought, especially by resorting to equivocal words and deceptive practices. If we face today the prospect of unjust laws, then Catholics in America, in solidarity with our fellow citizens, must have the courage not to obey them.* [“Our First, Most Cherished Freedom”]

Roman Catholic Womenpriests have been modeling canonical disobedience to an unjust law for ten years. We follow a powerful church tradition: Joan of Arc, burned at the stake and later canonized; Mother Mary MacKillop, excommunicated and later canonized (by our current Pope Benedict); Dorothy Day, vilified as a rabble-rouser and now on the way to beatification. And Fr. Roy Bourgeois, pioneer in the ongoing attempt to get the assassins training School of the Americas closed, and first male priest to publicly stand up and speak of the injustice of barring women from the altar. And certainly the women of the Danube Seven, who led the way for today’s 100+ legally ordained women priests by courageously accepting ordination on June 29, 2002.

Women priests are following their consciences, in prophetic obedience to God. We embrace our ordinations in apostolic succession and the tradition of the Roman Catholic church. We lead inclusive liturgies, using inclusive language and inviting everybody to the table. We invite you to embrace women’s ordination. Let’s envision together what it will mean for the whole church and for all women when *real* religious freedom is accepted and openly celebrated in the Roman Catholic church.