

Published on *National Catholic Reporter* (<https://www.ncronline.org>)

November 21, 2013 at 7:50am

---

## Bp Paprocki's Exorcism

by Michael Sean Winters

Distinctly Catholic

Bishop Thomas Paprocki of Springfield, Illinois held his service of "Prayers in Supplication and Exorcism in Reparation for the Sin of Same-Sex Marriage" yesterday at the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception. (h/t to Rocco for the link to the sermon.) In his opening paragraph, he states, *"I wish to preface my reflections by saying that I am conducting this prayer service and am speaking to you now with great reluctance. I did not seek to enter any controversy and I don't relish being part of one."* To which I reply: "Me thinks the lady doth protest too much." This service was unnecessary and unnecessarily provocative. It is hard to believe that +Paprocki does not relish this controversy. Lying is an intrinsic evil too.

Bishop Paprocki reminded his assembled flock that he held a similar service in 2011, a service of "Prayer and Repentance for those Harmed in the Church." Two years ago, he evidently did not feel the need to include exorcism in the mix. Does this not suggest that Bishop Paprocki thinks the rape of children is less devilish than same-sex marriage? Is that really true?

Bishop Paprocki also recalled "Day of Pardon," service conducted by Pope John Paul II in 2000, at which the pope asked forgiveness "for the past and present sins of her [the Church's] sons and daughters." It was a remarkable service indeed and worthy of being recalled. But, Pope John Paul II did not hold that service to beg pardon for the sins of others. A few weeks ago, we all listened to the Gospel parable of the publican at the synagogue. He sat at the back, dared not to raise his head, and murmured, "God, have mercy on me, a sinner." The publican did not say, "God, have mercy on them, a bunch of sinners." I suspect the parable would have lost its power if it had been rendered as +Paprocki might have written it.

Bishop Paprocki mentions that the Church is called to love all. He said:

*We must also affirm the teaching of the Catholic Church that homosexual persons "must be accepted with respect, compassion, and sensitivity. Every sign of unjust discrimination in their regard should be avoided. These persons are called to fulfill God's will in their lives and, if they are Christians, to unite to the sacrifice of the Lord's Cross the difficulties they may encounter from their condition." The Church loves homosexual persons and looks upon them with compassion, offering assistance through support groups such as the Courage Apostolate to live in accord with the virtue of chastity*

But, he said this at the end of his sermon, not at the beginning, and one is hard pressed to see how a service of exorcism could be deemed respectful. Besides, the whole "hate the sin, but love the sinner" mantra is singularly unhelpful in our culture, even if it contains a large kernel of truth. A real pastor, one who bears the smell of the sheep, would know that and find a less tired, and more convincing, statement of love and affection for those who will, in a likelihood and some merit, misunderstand what +Paprocki claims he was trying to accomplish.

Bishop Paprocki asserts, but does not explain, why same-sex marriage is such a civilizational threat, why, say, he has not previously held a service of "Prayers in Supplication and Exorcism in Reparation for the Sin of Divorce," which is certainly, in this culture, the greater threat to marriage than anything done by a small sliver of the population that happens to be gay and inclined to seek the legal protections marriage affords.

Yet, in spite of himself ? and one fears that +Paprocki has plenty of spite ? the bishop touched on something that is a genuine challenge in our culture. He stated, *"It is not hateful to say that an immoral action is sinful. On the contrary, the most compassionate thing we can do is help people to turn away from sin."* In a culture that idolizes tolerance as the preeminent virtue of our time, how does one admonish the sinner? How does the Church preach the saving Gospel of Jesus Christ, which implies that there is something from which we must be saved? But, +Paprocki very next sentence shows why he is such a dismal pastor of souls. He states: *"To ignore another person's wrongful actions is a sign of apathy or indifference, while fraternal correction is motivated by love for that person's well-being, as can be seen by the fact that our Lord Jesus himself urged such correction."* Where is the sense of patience? Where is the willingness to leave room for God's saving activity. Reading this obnoxious homily last night, I imagined our Lord and Savior looking down from Heaven and wondering if Bishop Paprocki's weltanschauung left any room for the Holy Spirit, or if it is not ?all-Paprocki, all the time.?

Last week, I had dinner with two old friends, both clerics. As I have sought to continue my own path to continual conversion to the Lord and fidelity to His Church, these men have been a great inspiration and I thanked them for that. The inspiration derived from two qualities, their example and their friendship. The inspiration also derived from the utter absence of judgment, even though there was, and is, much to judge! Like the disciples on the road to Emmaus, we have walked together. Unlike the disciples on the road to Emmaus, my two friends knew we were walking with Jesus. I came to that knowledge later than they did, and they helped bring me to that knowledge specifically by not intruding or interfering with my own slow, stubborn, faltering steps, but by showering me with friendship and quietly, insistently, serving as examples of holiness and freedom. It is hard for us Americans to think that the Church's teachings bring freedom. It was certainly hard for me to see it. They helped me to see, not only in their example and their friendship, but by making room for the Holy Spirit to accomplish what remains a work in progress.

Yesterday, while driving Ambrose to his water treadmill therapy, the Diane Rehm show focused on same-sex marriage. One of the guests were Maggie Gallagher of the American Principles Project and another was Jonathan Rauch of the Brookings Institution. If you did not catch the show, it is worth listening to.

Gallagher was better than I had ever heard her, I suspect, in part, because Rauch is the most persuasive and, well, conservative proponent of same-sex marriage. Gallagher was on to something when she stressed the importance of maintaining cultural ideals to support institutions like marriage that matter. Rauch was on to something when he pointed out that many gays came to recognize the necessity for marriage when, during the AIDS crisis, they discovered to their horror that cohabitation conferred no rights on partners in crushingly painful circumstances, facing many legal difficulties. It remains unclear to me why the Church did not support civil unions that would have conferred those rights while maintaining the cultural ideal of marriage as that between a man and a woman, a relationship I do think our society should privilege. But, that train has left the station.

The unasked question during the show ? and, while driving, I could not call in to ask it ? was this: Do not most ideals admit of certain exceptions?

## Advertisement

For civil law in a society founded on the proposition of equality before the law, the idea of exceptions is anathema. What is good for one, must be good for all. Indeed, the whole same sex marriage discussion was won by its advocates the second the discussion became one focused on rights. That was also the moment I realized how far were the Church's teachings about marriage from what the culture understands by marriage. For us, it is a sacrament, not a collection of rights, several hundred items in the Federal Code, indeed, "rights language" in the Church is almost always unhelpful and distorting.

But, in the Church, the idea of exceptions to an ideal is not a difficult thing to grasp, indeed, it is a recognition of our common condition. We have the idea of pilgrimage. We are, all of us, continually falling short of the ideal enunciated by our Lord: "You must be perfect even as your heavenly Father is perfect." We recognize that we are en route, not arrived, all of us. This recognition is not, as Bishop Paprocki seems to fear, a means to ignore the reality of sin. It is, or should be, a recognition of how our Church leaders should conduct themselves. The other day, in a similar context, I quoted these words from M. Cathleen Kaveny's book "Law's Virtues," and they seem apt again:

*Prophets emphasize the importance of clear, unambiguous witness to the transformative power of the inbreaking Kingdom of God. They believe that the purity of their witness to those values will be compromised if Catholics, and especially Catholic institutions, appear resigned to the great systemic evils of our time?. In contrast, pilgrims are acutely aware of just how far human society still remains from the kingdom of God and how difficult the journey continues to be. The consequences of sin and the sting of death are still all around us. The only way to ameliorate those consequences is by doing justice, loving mercy, and walking humbly with God. It is not enough to avoid sin; we have to love and serve our neighbors.*

Bishop Paprocki fancies himself a prophet. Perhaps he is. Perhaps same-sex marriage will prove to be the civilizational threat he discerns. I don't see it myself. I believe the Church today needs pilgrim leaders, men and women who walk with, not ahead, of the flock, whose love is palpable and whose friendship is a given, and whose example is shining in part because it is not demonstrative. His ways are ways of gentleness. Bishop Paprocki should think on that before he has another service of prayer and exorcism.

---

**Source URL (retrieved on 08/20/2017 - 03:19):** <https://www.ncronline.org/blogs/distinctly-catholic/bp-paprockis-exorcism>

**Links:**

[1] <https://www.ncronline.org/donate?clickSource=article-end>