

Persons with Same-Sex Attraction (SSA) and the Catholic Church:

The two previous bulletin articles I wrote were intended to lay the groundwork for a consideration of the issue of SSA (same-sex attraction). It is only when we understand the beauty of sex as it was intended by God's design that we can begin to understand what the Church teaches about SSA. At the outset of this discussion, it should be made clear that having SSA is **not** sinful. A person can only sin through a conscious decision of the will. Temptations or desires do not manifest a true act of the will and so they do not constitute sin. And this is true for everyone. We all experience desires and temptations which are only sinful if we choose to act on them. This is an important moral distinction that the Church makes regarding SSA.

Further, it is important to note that the topic of homosexuality is one of the most sensitive issues facing the Church today. It touches nearly every family. All of us know and love someone who experiences SSA, and these relationships challenge us to live the Gospel with both truth and compassion. No one should be judged on the basis of his or her sexual orientation or the temptations he or she experiences. Every person is much more than simply the experience of his or her sexual desires. If we were to identify a person by reducing him or her only to their sexual desires, we would diminish the fullness of that person and his or her innate dignity.

The Church loves and challenges all of us:

As Catholics, we are called to hold two essential truths: we must love and respect every person and be faithful to the moral teachings of Christ and the Church. Authentic charity never separates love from truth. Love embraces each person as a child of God; truth calls all of us to live in acceptance of the realities created by God Himself.

In my experience, people often emphasize one side over the other—some highlight acceptance, others moral teaching. True discipleship holds both together. During His earthly ministry, Jesus loved each person deeply and unconditionally, yet He always called people to repentance and new life. True teaching and acceptance are not opposite ends of a spectrum; they are rather two sides of the same coin. If I love someone, I will want to share the truth with that person. Further, if I believe in the truth, I will accept a person and love him or her within the context of a challenge to become something more than he or she already is.

In thinking about acceptance of the person with same-sex attraction, it would be inaccurate to interpret Jesus' Gospel message as simply one of inclusivity or diversity. These are good things, but they are not the core of the Gospel. His central message was always: "Repent and believe in the Good News." If we were to limit the Gospel message simply to accepting the sinner, we would never challenge any person to embrace the fullness of the Gospel. This challenge, of course, is meant for all of us. The person with same-sex attraction is no better or worse than any of us. Every person experiences challenges and struggles in an effort to live the Gospel. These challenges and temptations are the means whereby we can sanctify our lives and grow in holiness.

When either compassion or strict morality is emphasized at the expense of the other, something essential is lost. Overemphasizing acceptance of sinful behavior risks excusing sin, while focusing only on morality or sin may lead to unjust discrimination against another. We, as members of the Church, must always love every single person—-independent of personal struggles—while at the same time inviting everyone to deeper conversion. This is not just a mandate for people who experience SSA, but for every single person we encounter.

We find this balance in the tone and writing of the Catechism of the Catholic Church. These citations capture the balance of respect and compassion for every person, together with fidelity to the moral truth of our faith.

2357 Homosexual acts are intrinsically disordered... under no circumstances can they be approved.

2358 Persons with deep-seated homosexual tendencies must be accepted with respect, compassion, and sensitivity. Every sign of unjust discrimination should be avoided.

2359 Homosexual persons are called to chastity... they can and should gradually and resolutely approach Christian perfection.

Heroic witness of those with same-sex attraction

I think that it is important to note that there are many devout and holy Catholics and Christians who experience same-sex attraction and who are also totally faithful to the teachings of the Church. Sadly, there are some people—even within the Christian community—who want the Church to change her teaching regarding the morality of same-sex acts. These well-intentioned but misguided individuals believe that changing the teaching on same-sex acts would make life easier for the person with SSA. But in advocating this change, they unknowingly insult a large number of dedicated Christians who experience SSA and who simultaneously believe that the Church's teaching in the area of sexuality is unequivocally true.

It is, therefore, important to remember that advocating a change in Church teaching regarding human sexuality does not necessarily make one an advocate for those who experience SSA. Promoting this agenda may actually disregard the convictions and sacrifices of the Christian who experiences SSA but also joyfully surrenders to the teaching of the Church. Attempting to promote a change in Church teaching may in fact be insulting to those Christians who silently and heroically live the demanding challenge of the Gospel while also experiencing SSA.

In every community where I have served as a priest, I have found courageous men and women who experience same-sex attraction and who faithfully live lives of celibacy and sanctity. These courageous individuals are a shining example of fidelity in the midst of struggle. They are living saints who heroically, silently, and joyfully carry their cross in confident trust in God's grace and in the hope of the salvation given by Jesus through His sacraments—and their number is not negligible; nor should their witness be ignored.

On the Use of Pride and Rainbow Symbols

At times, Catholics may be seen displaying pride or rainbow symbols, often with sincere and compassionate intentions. Many Christians wish to express welcome and care, especially toward friends or family members who experience same-sex attraction, and to reassure them that they are loved and valued. That desire reflects something good and truly Christian.

However, these symbols carry more than one meaning. While they can be intended as signs of welcome, they are also widely used to promote ideas about human sexuality that contradict the Church's moral teaching. In this broader cultural context, such symbols often communicate not only "you are loved," but also an implicit rejection of the Church's teaching that same-sex sexual acts are morally wrong. For this reason, their use can unintentionally create confusion about what the Church believes and teaches.

It is also important to recognize that these symbols can be painful for men and women who experience same-sex attraction and who, at the same time, faithfully accept and strive to live according to the Church's moral teaching. For them, the widespread use of pride or rainbow symbols within Catholic settings can feel dismissive of their fidelity and sacrifices.

If these symbols conveyed only the message, "We love and respect every person," there would be no difficulty at all—because loving every person is at the heart of the Gospel. Unfortunately, they are also commonly used to advocate behaviors and lifestyles that the Church understands to be harmful to the human person and contrary to God's plan. In this way, they can promote an idea of acceptance that overlooks the call to conversion, holiness, and freedom from sin.

As Catholics, we must always affirm the dignity of every person and offer genuine care and accompaniment to those who experience same-sex attraction. At the same time, we must avoid endorsing symbols or messages that obscure the truth of the Gospel or the Church's moral teaching. True Christian charity never separates love from truth. Our support for one another must always be rooted in the call to holiness, repentance, and the hope of eternal life. There is really no place for these symbols in the life of a Catholic Christian or a Catholic institution, given their confusing and contradictory nature.

The Church is a place of welcome and healing for everyone

Fr. Zach, Fr. Jordan, and I are united in fidelity to the Church's teaching on this and every moral issue. Our desire is never to exclude, but to invite all people into the fullness of life and holiness that God desires for His children. As the Church teaches, it is not sinful to experience same-sex attraction; sin occurs only when one acts on these inclinations.

The Church welcomes everyone: the sinner and the saint, the broken and the searching. Each of us stands in need of conversion. Whether the struggle is pride, addiction, anger, or sexual brokenness, we are all called to let grace transform us. For those who experience same-sex attraction, the call to holiness may include a life of celibacy, lived in friendship with Christ and supported by the love of the Church.

In my next article in this series, I would like to explore a program that we are starting in our parish community called *Desert Streams / Living Waters*. This is a Christian ministry that exists to help individuals meet Jesus in their sexual and relational brokenness. It is for people who experience SSA as well as any other form of sexual or relational brokenness. The Church is not deaf to the struggles and challenges that are part of our human world. There is always hope and healing for those who seek the grace of Jesus in the midst of our human woundedness.

In Christ,
Fr. David Kime