Opinion
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Brebeuf Jesuit Preparatory School did a brave thing the other day. They disagreed with authority and claimed their own Catholic identity. An issue of governance emerged over the past two years, resulting in a formal archdiocesan canonical decree to no longer recognize Brebeuf Jesuit as a Catholic school in their territory.

What did they do? They refused to fire an employee despite evidence of being in a same-sex marriage. As Brebeuf alum and current professor Brett Krutzch states in his recent op-ed, "For a Jesuit institution to protect a teacher in a same-sex marriage against an archbishop set on his termination is nothing short of monumental."

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Having worked and been educated in Jesuit institutions for almost 30 years, my mind, heart, and imagination have been captured by this moment in the story of some followers of Jesus. To respectfully disagree, continue in the work that has been given for you to do, privilege the lives of those most in need of mercy and care, and do all this with humility and conviction simply dignifies our understanding of what church could actually be.

Primacy of conscience. Inclusion of Jesus. Centering on the dignity of the human person. These are all impulses, reminders, guidelines and goals of practice for any person of faith, especially for all Catholics. Discernment, examination of conscience and consciousness, contemplation in action, these are all values of Ignatian spirituality that color my life as a faithful Catholic.

I think of how I am invited to companion Jesus. I consider how Jesus companions me. I think of how I need to "humbly welcome the Word that has been planted in me" (James 1:21) as well as the opinions and perspectives of others I trust around me. I consider the ways in which Jesus called out church leaders in order to help them call in others who felt unwelcomed around them. What would be at stake for Jesus? I consider how he understands God's love for him and the necessity of his unwavering devotion to cultivating relationships with this God whose mercy, forgiveness and love embody true freedom and peace.

How would Jesus be present now? It seems so cliché, but we would all agree that he would position himself close to the most vulnerable and in need of God's tender,

loving care — the hemorrhaging woman, the woman caught in adultery, the disciple who betrayed him three times, the blind man, the children he placed in front of his disciples, and the crowds … so many crowds. So, I consider the lives of the students as they bear witness to respectful disagreement. What is at stake for them? Their faith lives? Their relationships to God and one another? I think of those whose lives, decisions and assertions of dignity teased better ways of love out of us.

This Sunday's Gospel invites us to imagine what walking with Jesus might look like. He is convinced of the challenge of Jerusalem and demands his followers to prioritize God, God's providence, and God's mysterious ways. Each time someone asked if they could take care of a personal responsibility before going all in, Jesus would clarify the reality of the uncertainty of this call. He summarizes this sentiment by saying, "No one who sets a hand to the plow and looks to what was left behind is fit for the kingdom of God."

This may sound harsh, but Jesus was clear: the kin-dom of God requires our full attention, our full being, our full devotion. We must not get wrapped up in the sentimentality of lost relationships when we have found and chosen one with Jesus. We must not lose sight of the goodness of God in our midst that gives us the courage to take the next step in faith. Even if we can imagine terrible consequences that require death and resurrection, we must be compelled to see this through to the end.

This, here, is the truest call to freedom through Christ. And it is for this that I am most grateful, most loving, most merciful and most compelled to take the next step in faith.

Let us all pray for students and alumni impacted by the recent decisions involving identity politics in the Archdiocese of Indianapolis, and in other territories that hold the tension of valuing both their beliefs and people. Let us all pray for all those people most impacted by institutional discrimination and acts of bigotry hiding behind a façade of religious freedom. Let us all pray for the leadership of the Midwest Jesuits, the leadership of the Archdiocese of Indianapolis and the leadership of all good people of goodwill. Let us all pray for all the families impacted by these recent incidents; I pray for an end to violence and an end to everything that keeps us from maintaining right relationships with one another.

[Jocelyn A. Sideco is a retreat leader, spiritual director and innovative minister who specializes in mission-centered ministry. Visit her online ecumenical ministry, In Good Company, at ingoodcompany.net.co or email her at jocelyn@ingoodcompany.net.co.]

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