Opinion
News



Worshippers pray during Mass at St. Francis of Assisi Church in New York City June 29. The liturgy, hosted by the parish's LGBT outreach ministry, is traditionally celebrated on the eve of the city's Pride March. (CNS/Gregory A. Shemitz)



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I need us all to stop for a moment and consider how you show up to others on any given Sunday.

Are you like me? I slip in a few moments after the liturgy has begun and slip out immediately as the recessional begins. Are you satisfied with listening to what's going on in the sanctuary but refuse to truly connect with the people around you for fear of interrupting their own contemplative space? Or do you participate in a liturgical ministry — are you in the choir, do you serve as an acolyte or read or never refuse the usher when asked to bring up the gifts?

What do others know about you?

I'm afraid my co-pray-ers don't know much about me besides where I usually sit, with whom, and maybe how often I come based on their own (ir)regularity. At least, that's about all I know of others around me.

No wonder this generation is starving for community, connection and relationship. They want to be seen, truly seen.

This Sunday's Gospel offers several points of entry for us to deepen our faith in a God who is trustworthy, a God who is faithful, and a God who requires more from each and every one of us.

A friend told me that our souls are pretty shy. It takes much effort for our souls to peek out from behind the comfort of the layers stuff that gets between me and you. I think of how someone's demonstration of trustworthiness allows me to settle better into myself and open up my soul.

"The person who is trustworthy in very small matters is also trustworthy in great ones" (Luke 16:10).

Wouldn't it be great if we in the pews would be trusted enough to be seen and heard within liturgy and therefore within our community? I know that hospitality hour afterward is a time for that, but coming from the extremely scripted and rehearsed

liturgy to the extremely fluid and awkward casual space of "getting to know one another" is just too drastic for my sensitive soul.

I'm challenging myself to see others better. I invite you to pray and see others as well.

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Let's start at one margin and see gay people. Yes, see gay people in our churches, in our pews. Fr. Bryan Massingale asked us to see him when he began his remarks at a recent panel conversation with, "I come to this conversation as a Black, gay priest and theologian." He was celebrating DignityUSA's 50th Anniversary.

Now I imagine, at minimum, 10% of all my priests are gay. How do I come to know God differently through the experiences and leadership of gay clergy? Do their concerns become my concerns? Am I able to offer them dignity and respect in the ways I offer straight priests? Why or why not?

Now I imagine seeing gay people in my church. Maybe the single woman who sits in the third pew from the back on the right side of the church is gay. Or maybe her child is. Maybe the two men that sit side by side each week in the fifth row on the left are partnered or married. How would hearing the church's letter, "Always Our Children" sound when the only people addressed in it are the parents of and the ministers to gay people?

I find a quiet space to allow God to enter into my imaginings. If I can see gay people in the news, at work, where I exercise, where I buy groceries, I ask God to allow me to see gay people in my church.

If this becomes too difficult, I pray with people who, like Massingale, have put themselves out there for others to come to know. When you want to or are able, pray with any of the following stories:

- Queerology Podcast — Matthias Roberts hosts a weekly podcast inviting (mostly) gay people to share their stories as people of faith. This episode, "90 seconds of Truth," features listeners who called in to share their own experiences of toxic Theology. Prepare to be moved.
- A Tiny Revolution Podcast — Kevin Garcia co-birthed "90 seconds of Truth" with Roberts, and their second part can be found here.

- Watch this 14-minute video of gay Catholics, published by Owning Our Faith.
- At Vine and Fig, Pat Gothman and Patrick Weston have created an online space where "Queer Catholics could have our lives affirmed as true, holy, and beautiful" and respond to "the need for greater community," a place to "show the Church the fruitfulness of our lives."
- #FaithfullyLGBT is a collection of stories from people living at the intersection of faith, gender and sexuality.



Altar server Angelo Alcasabas prepares the altar during annual "Pre-Pride Festive Mass" at St. Francis of Assisi Church in New York City June 29. (CNS/Gregory A. Shemitz)

After you've done that, bring your shy soul to this conversation so that you may see other people and grow in compassion. Then bring your shy soul to God and ask for the grace to love gay people. Then bring your shy soul to your pastor to seek ways of seeing one another so that we are able to come to know the mystery of God in all God's richness and complexity.

If you are gay and reading this post, how do praying with the above resources invite you to action in your faith community? Would you be willing to share your story or create a space during liturgy where you and others can be seen? Would you need support dismantling the decades of homophobic comments and avoidance you have internalized?

Let us all be worthy of trust in small matters. Let us, one by one, turn to another, share our shy soul, and respect, dignify and love the other shy soul in our midst.

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A version of this story appeared in the **Oct 18-31, 2019** print issue under the headline: Let's start by seeing gay people.