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How do you welcome strangers?

Janice Sevre-Duszynska | Nov. 22, 2011

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Candidate Kay Akers, Deacon Diane Dougherty, priests Janice Sevre-Duszynska and Katy Zatsick on Fort Benning Road in front of the Progressive Catholic Coalition table. (Submitted photo)

Editor's Note: *The following is the homily preached Nov. 19 by Janice Sevre-Duszynska, ordained a priest in the Association of Roman Catholic Women Priests. She and Franciscan Fr. Jerry Zawada led an inclusive Catholic eucharistic liturgy at the SOA Watch Vigil at Ft. Benning in Columbus, Ga., as part of the Progressive Catholic Coalition. Zawada and Sevre-Duszynska have both served jail time for civil disobedience to protest nuclear weapons and militarism.*

First Reading: "Comfort the afflicted and afflict the comfortable," in *The Eucharist and the Hunger of the World* by Monika K. Hellwig.
Second Reading: Ballad of the Carpenter (sung in English, then read in Spanish)
Gospel: Matthew 25: 31-46.

We afflicted the comfortable after showing "Pink Smoke Over the Vatican" for the first time in Rome in October. Following our press conference, our group met at the corner of Via Concilizione, the street leading to the Vatican. We were members of Call to Action, Women's Ordination Conference, and women priests. We were here to support Roy Bourgeois and women priests.

"What shall we sing?" we asked one another. I shook my ordination tambourine as the WOC banner was displayed and Roy brought out his red-and-white banner with "Ordain women priests" in English and Italian.

We were chanting the Celtic Alleluia and singing "Here I am, Lord" on our way to the Vatican to present the petition signed by 15,000 supporters of Roy and women priests. We were in Rome to cleanse the Vatican temple of sexism. A church that excludes women distracts us from being aware of the feminine aspect of spirituality and the experience and perceptions of women's living and dying. The result is we have a church with a distorted understanding of God. The imbalance creates evil, sin and the suffering continues in our world

community.

"What do you want? Women priests. When do you want them? Now," we shouted out.

Roy turned to me and said, "Janice, we're turning over the tables in the Vatican."

"Yes, Roy. We are," I nodded, smiling.

Temple cleansing is not easy and can be unsettling. The Vatican showed its resistance by having the Italian police take the WOC banner away from Erin Hanna, as she was the organizer, and putting her and Miriam Duignan, the translator from womenpriests.org [1] in London, into the police car, and with sirens at full blast, taking them to the police station. Then a plainclothes detective of the Italian police violently grabbed the banner away from Roy, pushing him. Roy joked at CTA in Milwaukee earlier this month that when he was driven to the jail in the police car, he had no sirens.

Then there was the issue of the three of us ordained who were in our albs and stoles: Ree Hudson, ordained woman priest from St. Louis, Mo., and Deacon Donna Rougeux and myself from Lexington, Ky. They would not arrest us. Nor would they let us into St. Peter's Square.

"They," he pointed to the Vatican temple, "they believe women are dangerous," said one of the policemen I talked with as he blocked me from the passage between the iron gates that now surround the temple. He continued: "Your priestly garb is a protest. We cannot let you in."

Then he whispered to me how he and the others support women priests, but that he must "do his job." Yet when he said this to me, I thought of military soldiers doing their "jobs" too.

"What does your conscience tell you?" I asked him. He just smiled and stood there.

I grabbed hold of my alb and stole and reflected. They've excommunicated us women priests. Told us in "delicta graviora" that we are in the same category of sin as pedophile priests -- whom they have not excommunicated. And now they won't let us into the temple area. Like the Pharisees, they are afraid of table turners, temple cleansers ... led by the Spirit within ...

We had afflicted the comfortable: our brother priests at the Vatican.

Many people recognize the underlying connections between male-only images of God and a domination/subordination pattern of human relationships that contribute to violence in our world, including violence toward women and children.

Jesus' attitude toward women was revolutionary. The Last Supper was not an ordination. The 12 apostles were symbolic of the 12 tribes of Israel. Mary Magdalene was the "Apostle to the Apostles." The archaeological research of the early Church by theologians like Dorothy Irvin and Gary Macy provide scholarly evidence of a tradition of women deacons, priests and bishops during early Christianity.

Jesus challenged the religious and civil authorities of his time for the empowerment of the marginalized, including women. Women's rights are human rights. We are claiming the right to stand "in persona Christi" -- in the person of Christ -- as equals to men.

The full equality of women is the voice of God in our time. Ours is a holy shakeup of the Catholic hierarchy who treat women as strangers and give them no welcome. In today's Gospel, Jesus says, "I was a stranger and you gave me no welcome."

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[1] http://www.womenpriests.org