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In all things, love

by Tony Magliano

Making a Difference

The richness of the ritual, the lovely music, a challenging homily and the enthusiastic prayerfulness of the assembly was a wonderful experience of Catholic Christian community.

The recent installation of Archbishop William E. Lori, as the chief shepherd of the Archdiocese of Baltimore, was for me a taste of Catholic unity -- but only a fleeting taste.

In sad contrast, there is so much hurt, alienation, distrust, pride, anger and apathy among so many Catholics.

I felt an even stronger sense of our wounded Catholic community after receiving numerous responses from a recent column I wrote highlighting the need of our suffering world for a prophetic Catholic church.

Numerous readers expressed strong sentiments that certain bishops had failed to protect children from a small minority of sexually abusive clerics, and they indicated their sense that most of the hierarchy often displays an insensitive use of its power. Therefore, they wrote that the Catholic church is in no position to be prophetic.

Well, yes and no.

We imperfect human beings are called by the Perfect to become saints. It's an ongoing process of conversion. However, in all of our weaknesses, we must do our best to speak and act as the Lord's disciples on behalf of our hurting world. But the holier we become, the more effective our witness will be.

An essential aspect of holiness is a willingness to show genuine respect to everyone -- regardless of status.

The bishops, as successors of the Twelve Apostles, deserve our respect. We need to seriously consider their insights as we strive to form our consciences in harmony with the Gospel.

For their part, the bishops have an equal duty to respect the laity. The Second Vatican Council clearly teaches that through baptism and confirmation, the Lord himself has given the laity an essential share in the saving mission of the church.

But it is important to realize there are certain things the bishops simply cannot do, and are, therefore, not being disrespectful towards the desires of some among the laity.

A hot-button example is gay and lesbian "marriage." It might be politically correct, but it's not morally correct. Sacred scripture, sacred tradition and natural law strongly teach that homosexual activity is not part of God's plan.

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But what the bishops can do far better -- and this applies to the laity as well -- is to prophetically and tirelessly address, in the words of Pope Paul VI, the sufferings of people struggling "to overcome everything which condemns them to remain on the margin of life: famine, chronic disease, illiteracy, poverty, injustices in international relations and especially in commercial exchanges, situations of economic and cultural neo-colonialism sometimes as cruel as the old political colonialism.

"The church ... has the duty to proclaim the liberation of millions of human beings ... the duty of assisting the birth of this liberation, of giving witness to it, of ensuring that it is complete" ("On Evangelization in the Modern World," No. 30).

But this essential duty will not be fulfilled as long as so much disrespect and unkindness remains unhealed in the church.

In the midst of our hurts, disagreements and confusion, we would be wise to consider these words of good Pope John XXIII: " The common saying, expressed in various ways and attributed to various authors, must be recalled with approval: in essentials, unity; in doubtful matters, liberty; in all things, charity."

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