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Should I stay or should I go?

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Usually it takes a cute picture of my two children for a Facebook post to warrant dozens of "likes." But a quick note about my experience at Mass yesterday is getting so much positive reaction from online friends that it may rival that adorable Easter photo of my daughter in her Easter bonnet.

All I did was mention that our parish had a dad give a "reflection" after our priest's homily for Father's Day--and that not only was he an adoptive parent, but also a gay man.

"Awesome!" wrote one commenter. "Uplifting," said another, who instead got a disciplinary speech at her parish.

I have to be honest: Although I was definitely inspired by this man's words, I also didn't initially see it as that big of a big deal. Our parish has many gay and lesbian members and families, so it's not out of the ordinary to see them participating in all aspects of parish life.

But the reaction from other Catholic friends, who saw this as such a visible sign of hope during a time of such hopelessness in our church, has given me pause.

In times like this, when parishes are trying to rally parishioners to fight marriage equality bills or "religious liberty" over a women's health issue, my parish's decision to invite this man to speak from the pulpit takes extraordinary courage.

And it challenges the attitude of New York Times op-ed columnist Bill Keller, who says liberal Catholics should throw in the towel and admit defeat:

"Much as I wish I could encourage the discontented, the Catholics of open minds and open hearts,

to stay put and fight the good fight, this is a lost cause. Donohue is right. Summon your fortitude, and just go. If you are not getting the spiritual sustenance you need, if you are uneasy being part of an institution out of step with your conscience ? then go. The restive nuns who are planning a field trip to Rome for a bit of dialogue? Be assured, unless you plan to grovel, no one will be listening. Sisters, just go. Bill Donohue will hold the door for you."

I'll be the first to admit that the idea of finding a new spiritual community has crossed my mind more than a few times in the past year. The nonstop negative news of church opposition to contraceptive coverage for working women, LGBT folks, "radical feminist" nuns and even the Girl Scouts has me wondering if it is psychologically and spiritually healthy to keep calling myself Catholic. The clunky and theologically problematic language of the new Mass changes has affected my ability to pray on Sundays. And I've already diverted my financial contributions so as not to support church institutions that use it fight pedophilia victims and feminist scholars.

But, thanks to my pastor and pastoral team who made this decision, a courageous father who shared his story, and my Facebook friends who reminded me that this is a sign of hope, I will hang on. At least for now.

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