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## No ministry allowed for gay Catholics

by Pat Perriello

NCR Today

This Huffington Post article tells the sad and unfortunate story of a gay Catholic who has been told to stop serving the Catholic community to which he belongs. The story occurs in the Rockville Centre diocese in New York.

A couple of items stand out. First of all, what he is no longer able to do is perform good works. He was visiting those in the parish who were homebound. He was serving with Consolation Ministry, and he was working with the Society of St. Vincent de Paul. All represent classic corporal works of mercy. Both his bishop and his pastor have told him to cease and desist. Apparently because he is gay and recently married, his good works no longer have value.

This circumstance reminds me of the story the nuns used to tell us years ago about mortal sin. There was a blind man who was also a famous author. One night, he awoke with an inspiration and sat down at his typewriter to get his thoughts on paper. He typed several pages before going back to bed. In the morning, his assistant arrived, and he told her of the brilliant work he had done the previous evening. The assistant was crestfallen as she explained that she had removed the typewriter ribbon the previous evening and planned to replace it with a new one this morning. All his work had been for naught and was lost. So it goes with a soul in mortal sin: No good work has any value if you lack sanctifying grace because you have committed a mortal sin.

May I suggest a few problems with this anecdote? The most obvious problem is that it doesn't apply anymore because people no longer know what typewriters or typewriter ribbons are. Beyond that minor detail, there is the issue of the Pelagian heresy, which includes the belief that you can earn your own salvation through good works. This notion certainly flies in the face of St. Paul and his epistle to the Romans.

Secondly, I find it troubling that we can limit God's power to recognize and respond to goodness in his creation because someone has slipped into mortal sin. I suspect the young gay man in the Huffington Post article can still do good works and serve God. In fact, I believe God's power is great enough to value goodness in anyone: Catholic, Christian, non-Christian or nonbeliever. God's power is greater than church structures that sometimes seem designed to constrain that power.

My other concern about this story is that the sanctions grew out of an elite spy system that appears determined to catch people doing things wrong and force bishops and priests into a position where they feel compelled to act on these events. We have unfortunately been seeing this kind of behavior in our parishes at least since the time of Pope John Paul II. It is divisive, uncharitable, unchristian and inappropriate as a means of resolving disagreements within the Christian community. My hope is that those who are determined to divide the church will have a less receptive ear in the papacy of Pope Francis and that dioceses around the world will feel more comfortable making their own considered judgments about issues rather than feeling pressured to conform to the whims of the loudest voices.

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