

Pain and Possibility – Being a Catholic Parent of Gay Children by Beth Garascia



Being a Catholic parent of one gay and one lesbian young adult has meant for me a long journey to understand how those two important portions of my identity can both be gifts. I am Catholic to the core of my being; I love the Church, the Eucharist, the liturgy, the Marianist family to which I belong.

At the same time I love my two gay children deeply and unconditionally. I struggle with the Church's teaching: on the one hand, the bishops have taught us in "Always Our Children" to embrace our children and that God loves every person as a unique individual. On the other hand, gays are called "objectively disordered"; they are not welcomed or in some cases even acknowledged in our parishes.

If they are talked about, it is often in negative terms. In our family's parish a pamphlet called "Homosexuality and Hope" published by the Catholic Medical Association was distributed in a workshop called "To Have Life and Have it Abundantly". The pamphlet states that homosexuality may be caused by one or more in a list of nine negative causes, among which are sexual abuse or rape, a controlling mother or a distant father. Not surprisingly, gays feel ignored and in exile, and as a parent of two gay children, I am silenced. This is a strange sort of doublespeak—how can a child of God be objectively disordered? Why are his parents' voices taken away?

Although I have been smacked in the head by my powerlessness more than once in my life, like most Americans I still unthinkingly at times buy into the myth of being in control of myself, my destiny, others and the world.

When my son told my husband and me that he was gay about eight years ago, we were not surprised. We had suspected as much for several years, and were in some ways relieved. But the news brought a grief reaction: maybe it was our fault; maybe we had been "too liberal", too accepting. We worried about the safety of our then 18 year old son; would he make good decisions and act out of integrity with regard to his sexuality? We also feared that his life would be much harder as a gay person than as a straight man. In the end we talked to him about our apprehensions, but we also trusted that he would be the responsible person that he had always been. The powerlessness I felt then had to do not only with worries about his safety but also with loss. He has the caring nature that would make such a good father, and he may never be one now! There will never be a traditional marriage to a woman or a conventional nuclear family. I still sometimes mourn for what could have been while I love my son for who he is in the present moment: a creative, caring man with a talent for designing new spaces as well as for assisting others to reconcile.



Four years later, our daughter first told us she might be gay and then eventually she confirmed her sexual orientation. We had never suspected she was gay: this was a different scenario. Again there was a grief reaction and a fear that her life would not be easy because of her orientation. It was a stretch for me to accept that we have two gay children. It wasn't up to me, however, to decide whether or not she was gay. She is still the same daughter we always knew and loved, a very warm, talented and passionate young woman with a wonderful sense of humor who is a much loved part of our family.

At this point, if someone gave me a magic wand and told me that with a wave I could cause both of them to be straight, I wouldn't do it because it would change an integral part of who they are, the totality of which is a gift of God to our family and our community.

What is most difficult to accept is that the Church hierarchy makes pronouncements about homosexuality without listening to the experiences of gays and their families. My hope is that there will at some point be forums where we are asked to share what we have lived. As Rachel Naomi Remen, M.D., puts it in *Kitchen Table Wisdom*, "Listening is the oldest and perhaps the most powerful tool of healing. It is often through the quality of our listening and not the wisdom of our words that we are able to effect the most profound changes in the people around us...Listening creates a holy silence."

So on this day it is clear to me that I am not in as much control of myself, my destiny, and others, much less the world as I would often like to be. I am working to accept the grief when it comes to me, to love and enjoy my two gay children for who they are and to do what I can in asking the Church hierarchy to listen to my experiences. When friends or co-workers listen to my story with empathy, mentally entering into what I'm feeling, it is one of the greatest gifts they can give me.

Letting go of expectations, listening to each other's stories and accepting one another for who we are...isn't this all we can expect of one another?

