

Wednesday, April 8, 2009

Good evening. (I am Pat Brush.)

When Pat Gill asked me if I would offer the homily tonight, she said that I should talk about spirituality. Why she asked me, I don't know. I've never been known as a particularly spiritual person.

She also said that I should try to keep it to eight minutes and that it probably wouldn't be a good idea to discuss my faith journey from the moment of my baptism. I agreed with her ... so I'm going to start with my birth.

I am a cradle Anglican. My mother was a Sunday School teacher here at St Michael's and then at All Saints' Westboro. After many years as Sunday School Superintendent, she went on to hold a position with the diocese. Going to church was an important part of my family's tradition. I have been a faithful Anglican, going to church every Sunday, and participating in study and good works. I have enjoyed the communities in the church and I appreciate the music and ceremony of worship.

But there has been a problem throughout. For most of my life, I didn't feel anything. Worship didn't move me. Study was fascinating but it didn't bring me any closer to feeling anything about God or Jesus. Participating in good works was fulfilling in itself but same problem.

I thought there must be something wrong with me. Something that I wasn't getting.

When I was at the appropriate age, I was confirmed into the Anglican church. Really, it was more about me confirming my mother's faith so that she wouldn't be embarrassed to have a child flunk out of Jesus school. I was sure that when I stood in front of that bishop and made those declarations that the floor was going to open up and swallow me. God must know that I was lying.

I continued along in that way for years. Even when I had direct evidence to the contrary, I still couldn't summon up any feelings of true faith-full-ness.

Thirty years ago, I started hearing a call to the priesthood. My answer was something along the lines of, "What are you nuts? I don't hardly even believe in you." This went on for twenty-five years with me always having a good reason why I couldn't be a priest.

Once, I was up in the Diocese of Algoma attending my friend Marie's ordination. I was sitting beside a man that I didn't know at all. During communion, he turned to me and said, "Why aren't you up there with them?" indicating the altar. I about fell out of my pew. When I recovered breath, I demanded to know why he had just said that. He didn't know. He just had a feeling. He had a feeling. I didn't.

Marie told me that he searched her out at the reception and said to her, "That woman has a call, doesn't she."

But wait. It gets worse. Fourteen years ago, I was out of town attending a conference and started having some health difficulties. A woman who was a therapeutic touch practitioner came to me because she felt that I needed help. Therapeutic touch is where the person passes their hands over you without touching you and somehow they diagnose you and heal you. In my mind, I'm going, "Doo doo doo doo" but at that point I was willing to try anything. As part of the process, she taught me to meditate. Whatever she did worked and I gained a lot of relief.

Later that day, I thought I would try that meditating thing again. She had told me to imagine myself going down in an elevator. To watch the floor numbers count down and when they got down to the ground floor, open the doors in my mind and go to a place that brought me a lot of peace. When I did it with her, I went deep in the forest near my parents' cottage to a brook that waterfalls into a very still pond.

This time, I went down in the elevator and when I reached the bottom, I opened the doors to see Jesus standing there. He didn't say anything or do anything. I only spent a few seconds with him because all of a sudden, a teenager broke down my hotel room door. He thought it was his room and that he just couldn't get the key to work. Those few seconds with Jesus were enough to give me the most amazing feeling of peace and wholeness. I was very well for a long time after that. I began to have a better connection to my faith instead of it being merely an intellectual exercise.

I don't often tell this story because people, even church people, tend to look at me like I have three heads.

But even with God continually talking at me, and seeing Jesus and receiving healing, I still didn't have any sense of my own spirituality.

It has only been in the last few years that I have started to understand what my problem was.

I was severely abused as a child. I should say at this point, that the abuser was not my mother.

The way that I survived the abuse was to shut my self, my sense of me, away and do whatever people in authority told me to. My education was about what my parents thought I should learn. I wasn't allowed to study music in school even though I sang before I talked and it was hard for folks to get me to stop singing. I went to University, where I was expected to find a husband. I failed. I didn't get either the degree or the husband, but it wasn't for lack of trying. Eventually I did find the perfect husband that suited my parents' taste, married and had children. The marriage was horrible. The children are wonderful.

Over the years, I lost any remaining sense of who I was, or what I wanted, or what brought me joy. I even stopped singing. For more than ten years, I didn't sing.

And I attended church every week where I did receive some amount of comfort.

Then a miracle happened. Just over three and a half years ago, I met Bev. Very soon we were best buddies, having coffee together after church and emailing each other several messages a day. When I realized that I was in love with her, I was

shocked. When I learned that there was a possibility that my love might be returned, every energy in my body danced. And that is when my healing started.

What I have learned since then is that spirituality and sexuality are linked. Jesus did not come just as spirit but as spirit in a body. We live as spirit in a body. And bodies have sexuality. If we deny any part of ourselves, we deny our creation and our Creator. By hiding away my sense of self, and not discovering my sexuality, I didn't come to God as my whole person. I didn't worship as me. I worshipped as an artificial societal construct. When I realized my sexuality, I discovered an essential part of who I am as God's child.

For the past three years, I have been rebuilding my identity and discovering who I am meant to be. Moving from All Saints' Westboro back to St Michael's has been a very positive step in the development of my spirituality. Here, I get to worship as who I am without constraint. That is an incredible gift.

As I rebuild my self, I am developing a sense of my spirituality. And not surprisingly, it really is linked very closely to music. Singing is a full body and mind exercise. It allows me to release whatever load I am carrying and be present with God.

I think that there is supposed to be some kind of message for you in this. I guess it could be that you might want to think about who you are. Is there anything that holds you back from being who you are meant to be? Is there anything that you do that makes you feel more fully yourself? Try exploring those ideas and see where they lead you in your understanding of your own spirituality. Amen

