

Sunday, July 3, 2016
EXPRESSIONS by Father Ed

Sorry for Prejudice

Pope Francis, while flying back to Rome from Armenia, was asked by reporters about the remarks of Cardinal Reinhard Marx at a symposium at Trinity College in Dublin. The Cardinal, a member of the Pope's Council of Nine and the Archbishop of Munich, asserted that the Church ought to apologize to gays and women for the prejudice and injustice they have experienced both within the Church and the wider world. The Church, according to the cardinal, clearly influenced the existing culture. "The history of homosexuals in our society is a very bad history because we have done a lot to marginalize them and ... as church and as society we have to say sorry." Pope Francis was even more explicit, even extending the context: "I believe that the Church not only should apologize to the person who is gay whom it has offended, but also to the poor, to exploited women, to children exploited for labor; it also has to ask forgiveness for having blessed many weapons."

The apologies that both Pope Francis and Cardinal Marx recommended are particularly relevant in this Holy Year of Mercy, an ideal time for the Church itself to set a public example of seeking mercy and forgiveness for its own transgressions, and not merely bestowing it on others. Pope Francis perhaps could arrange a public prayer service at St. Peter's Basilica in much the same way Pope John Paul II did to apologize for the sexual abuse scandal. This apology, however, must be more sincere, not just words but a genuine change of heart, and truly re-orient the Church's attitude towards women and gays. The Church must always mirror the practice of Jesus himself who treated all persons, regardless of identity, as children of God. No other tradition matters, except the standard of the Golden Rule: "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you" (Matthew 7:12). Local churches and parishes could organize similar services, acknowledging their own participation in abetting prejudice. Women and gays, I believe should be invited to help plan these services. Here at St. Timothy's, we can begin discussing what we might want to do.

Apologies are a necessary first step for true renewal. They are an integral part of the Twelve Step program. Individuals, organizations, especially religious ones, and nations must apologize for past wrongs. Germany has embedded the Holocaust into their collective national identity. South Africa established the Truth & Reconciliation Commission offering everyone the opportunity to admit and apologize for their participation in apartheid. Apologies reject the negative of past history and allow the possibility of a new future. Prejudice will only end if we admit our complicity and seek forgiveness.