

Reflection

Advent

2021

Pastoral

Second Sunday of

December 4-5,

In reflecting with Our Lady, Undoer of Knots on the issue of clericalism on this second week of Advent, just a little searching reveals a very big history of sin and missed opportunities to truly live the Gospel. The dictionary says “clericalism is a policy of maintaining or increasing the power of a religious hierarchy.” Those of us who have a long-lived life in the Roman Catholic Church know that this is very much a lived reality in our church lives.

Historically the early church was all one in the first centuries after Jesus when persecution was a part of daily lives. When Theodosius came to power in the late 4th century CE he provided government funding to the Christian churches and thus was born a hierarchy that had to manage the wealth. As the years unfolded the separation of clergy and “everyone else” was solidified into what we see today. Who among us cannot tell stories of being treated as or feeling like “everyone else?”

Several years ago my father died at the age of 91. Most of his life had been spent in the small town where he grew up, raised our family, buried his wife and supported the local church community, even requesting that a significant part of his small estate be donated to the church he had loved. When it came time for visitation, our

family requested that his body be brought to this place he loved so that the “old-timers” could have time to come and say good-bye. (There was already a long precedent of this being done in this church; also the pastor was relatively new and did not know our family). We were working with the Deacon and initially the Pastor said ,”No.” I was outraged but since I wasn’t the one making the arrangements quietly encouraged the coordinator to return and ask again. We did get to honor Dad in his home church for an allotted time but it left me feeling angry and dismissed.

Much of clericalism today is spoken of in terms of the clergy sexual abuse scandals and while the harm that has been done is outrageous, evil and wrong, it is not the only arena where it continues to harm the life of God’s people. The call of living the Gospel is exactly that, LIVING the Gospel. In Paul’s letter to the people of Phillipi he says he prays with joy “because of your partnership for the gospel from the first day until now;” in the NRSV we read “because of your sharing in the gospel.”

Isn’t that what we do here at St. Cronan’s? We live that baptismal call by welcoming the little ones, witnessing all of life’s challenging moments, praying for one another in good times and in bad, reaching out to the homeless and those who need us and we do it together.

Kathy Stock

