

Happy Pride!

Honestly, this homily was really difficult to write. I'm full of so much love and so much awe and so much respect for all the people in this room, and all of the LGBTQIA folks who have come before me that I wonder, what do I have to contribute? To say? This year, we are honoring the 50th anniversary of Stonewall and our formidable queer heroes like Sylvia Rivera and Marcia P. Johnson. Pride is born out of struggle, and I have not struggled. My queerness has always been something that I knew about and accepted about myself, easily. When I came out at 14, my mom forgot and my dad said, "Who IS straight, anyway?"

When I was a freshman at my Dominican, all-girls high school, I had to take a religion class called *Sex and the Teenager*. I was shocked at the beginning of Chapter 10 of our textbook, "Homosexuality," which I still remember: "Homosexual persons are called to a special celibate life in communion with God." I was a pretty quiet high schooler -- so quiet that my parents' friends joked that they barely ever heard me talk. But even so, I was so angry that I argued vehemently with the teacher and ended up getting thrown out of class. Even at the time, I didn't doubt that gayness was good. I was, however, sure that this stupid book was not good.

And that sense of self, and self-worth, that sureness in the pit of my stomach: that's because of everybody here. It's because of my LGBTQIA family -- the ones I'm related to by blood, the ones who have become a part of my family over time, and the ones I've never met but who were fighting and marching for liberation since before I was born.

I've got a bunch of queer cousins. To kick off Pride Month this year, my Cousin Liz texted me with her calculated percentages of LGBTQIA people in our generation of our family, and the generation just below us. She concluded: it's so high, because one of our grandparents or one of their siblings MUST have been queer. And, of course, we spun stories of who we thought might have been gay, or bi, or genderqueer. I've been thinking so much about why we did that -- why we made all this up. Because, of

course, we'll never know. If our grandma had diabetes, we would know. If our grandpop had a great singing voice, we would know. That kind of family knowledge is passed down. But what we were longing for in that conversation were queer elders. We made up history because we so want to ask: when did you know? Who was your first crush?? What did you wonder? What hurt you? What community did you have, and what did you do together? Who were your heroes?

About a year ago, I came across the instagram account @lgbt_history started by Matthew Riemer and Leighton Brown. They, two gay men, were fascinated by old pictures of LGBTQIA people and communities, which they would find everywhere from archives to yard sales. They wrote, "Looking at the pictures together, we'd get lost for hours; we had a visceral, emotional reaction, as if we'd discovered a family album full of people to whom we were deeply connected -- infinitely indebted -- and about whom we knew next to nothing." And so they posted them online. And people started writing in, saying, "That's a photo of me!" or "That's my friend," and would remember the moments when the photos were taken, or just recall people's lives. Daily, lived, moments that wouldn't necessarily find their way into a history book. They got other emails, too -- "usually," they said, "from isolated young people, telling us that the accessible introduction to history made them feel less alone." Not only are we here and queer, but we've always been here, and these are the moments that matter.

So much of the rhetoric that is all around us right now is: "Being gay is just like being straight!" Or, "See? We're just like everyone else!" But, I don't feel like everybody else -- do you? Joan Nestle, the cofounder of Lesbian Herstory Archives, said, our "Roots lie in the history of a people who were called freaks." So often, that is where we hear prophetic voices, too.

I work in a pretty rad/hip elementary school where I get to spend a lot of time talking about being queer with 4 through 8 year-olds. Things are getting better, right? There are children's books that show gay parents. Kindergarteners know who Harvey Milk is. A 2nd grader told me this week about going to her first pride march that she was "super stoked to be part of

the rainbow resistance party” and that she knew it was the right thing because, “squiggly lines are way more interesting.” But that isn’t the only kind of story we hear. The kids in a queer young adult book group that I run were reading a book called Beast a few months ago. They chose it, I had never heard of it. And, I hated it and they couldn’t get enough. The basic storyline is a re-telling of Beauty and Beast, but the Beast is a cis, straight boy, and Beauty is a trans girl. Beast is a super jerk throughout the whole book, which is told from his perspective. He’s having a hard time and he expresses his frustration and anger at Beauty, who is perpetually patient and understanding of his blatant and sometimes violent transphobia. Why did they like this book? I just didn’t get it, and I told them that. All the kids in this book group are trans or non-binary and they all agreed: “We want to know,” they said, “What people are thinking when they look at us. What are they thinking that they’ve learned they’re not supposed to say to my face? And how can I tell what they’re thinking so that I can stick up for myself, or just walk away?”

How do we joyfully celebrate AND strongly resist? I think that storytelling is at the heart of this. That’s what we hear in the Pentecost story, isn’t it? Communication, sharing who we are and hearing from others, is at the root of the holy spirit. And I would argue that it is exactly the gifts of the holy spirit that inspire right action through righteous anger. Wisdom? Check. Understanding? Check. Counsel? Check. Fortitude? Check. We could go on and on. But at the root of all of these is the ability to communicate, to understand each other.

Storytelling is also a way to bridge the gap between generations. A few years ago, the students in my 2nd grade class were OBSESSED with changemakers, which is a word we use at our school to talk about activists who have worked to make change in our world. But, they were really only interested in historical figures who were all dead, like Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and Ghandi. This made things like racism and sexism feel far away and solved, and so it was confusing to them when they experienced the same problems in their own lives. One student said of an argument with a peer, “He told me my skin is ugly, and I don’t know if he said that

because I'm part Mexican or because he's just trying to say something mean." At the same time that this was happening, they were also OBSESSED with trading Pokemon cards. So, we decided to challenge them to make a game: Cards for Change. Each student interviewed family members about people who had a direct impact on their lives, and we did the same as teachers. The list of changemakers that our students called on and referenced grew to include dance teachers, grandparents, and the recent feminist King of Saudi Arabia.

My changemaker was: Kathy Ann. She shared stories of being a member of Dignity/Boston and marching in Pride. Here's the card. It's got the typical information that you'd have on a trading card: name, photo, and super powers. The student who wrote this card decided that Kathy Ann's super powers are courage, risk taking, and empathy. I couldn't agree more.

One of the stories that Kathy Ann shared was about marching in Pride with a paper bag over her head. We re-read these cards every year, and every year the children in my school are shocked that the kind of bigotry that would cause an LGBTQIA person to lose their job was so recent. The part that I always hone in on is the sentence: "Kathy Ann was happy with herself, but upset with the ideas in the world that made people think it wasn't okay to be a lesbian." Pride, self-worth, and self-respect sometimes feels like it's in the hands of other people, but it's not. This is a prophetic message. Kathy Ann also said that Dignity/Boston is family because family is "other people who support you and hold you up." That work, to love and support each other through the pursuit of justice, is a gift of the Holy Spirit. It is given to all of us, and it is at work in our lives and our communities today. It is work that we are called to do.

As this 2nd grader wrote here on the card, "Kathy Ann" -- and everyone here -- "teaches me that it is important to stand up for what you know is right, even if it is hard and scary." This Pride, and this Pentecost, let us use the power of our voices to strengthen the ties that bind us together. In our Pride, let us rise up and fight back for the rights of all communities under attack.