

2/17/96

Another Perspective

By Father Timothy P. Stein, Editor

By Susa

If It Feels Like A Family, It Is A Family

A few weeks ago I saw the musical play "Falsettos" at the Pittsburgh Public Theater.

"Falsettos" is no "Sound of Music." The characters are (to quote a song from the second act) "homosexuals, mothers with children, short insomniacs, and a teeny - tiny band." The seven actors portray a divorced husband and wife, his male lover, her new husband, the lesbians from next door, and the husband and wife's 12 year old son. The play does not address the morality or immorality of homosexual relations, divorce and remarriage, or any of the other perceived threats to traditional family values. What it does do is show how these seven people choose to become a family. Ultimately the six adults, each carrying more than their full share of baggage, are brought together and drawn together as a family by the boy, Jason.

I have always been fascinated by families. I think that earlier in life I made the mistake of thinking that all families were like my family: two parents, two children, four grandparents, and lots of aunts, uncles and cousins to the nth degree. I even grew up knowing two of my great - grandparents. My family has always been one of the biggest blessings in my life. I count on my family for love, support and stability. I know that with these people I can be myself: I am loved and valued simply because I'm me.

When I left home and went away to college, and then to seminary, I was amazed to find out that very few families looked like my own. My best friend in seminary had lost count of the number of step - parents he had. He acquired at least two new step - fathers during the four years we were in school together. But that was okay with him: that was the reality of his family life, and he lived with it.

In my years of ministry, I have encountered many different families - - families of varying shapes, sizes and configurations. I have learned the truth of the statement "There are as many kinds of families as there are people living - - and loving - - in them."

A mother, a father, and a child (or children) does not automatically a family make. A family is much more than a biological equation. Therapists speak of "family of origin" and "family of choice." I believe that every family - - even a person's biological family or family of origin is a family of choice. Through the give - and - take of daily life, through decisions consciously made in the short term and over the long haul, families are made, not born.

So, "Falsettos" was no "Sound of Music." Homosexuals, mothers with children, short insomniacs and a teeny - tiny band do not add up to nuns, naval captains, seven singing children and the Austrian Alps. But like the family in "Falsettos" the Trapp Family was a family of choice, too. Maria was invited into that family to be both wife and mother. She was invited to share life and love with people she cared about and who cared about her.

And that's what families are all about. Whether a particular family looks like your family or not, if the people comprising it find family values there, and have hearts big enough to invite others into their orbit, it's deserving of the family name.

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Another Perspective

By Father Timothy P. Stein, Editor

"Nothing Sacred"

I like it. I really like it.

"Nothing Sacred," the much touted ABC drama about a young priest and his ministry is nowhere near as bad as many folks said it would be. Nor was it quite as good as it could be. But from this priest's point of view, it's pretty darned good.

I wasn't going to watch the first episode. Do doctors relax by watching "ER" or "Chicago Hope"? Did lawyers take an evening off to watch "LA Law"? But remember, I get very few television channels in Chest Springs, so I decided to check out this glimpse into the life and ministry of Father Ray and the other priests at Saint Thomas Parish. And I liked it. I really liked it.

Okay, so a good technical advisor should be hired as soon as possible. Who picks out Father Ray's vestments, for starters? And why can't he use the valid sacramental form when anointing the sick or baptizing the newborn? What kind of a contemplative monastery lets a retreatant don the habit on the day he arrives? And I wasn't as upset about the penitent coming into the confessional with a tape recorder as I was that Father Ray could be sitting there bouncing a ball off of the walls. But these are the kinds of things that can be worked out if the series stays on the air.

What "Nothing Sacred" did do a good job with was portraying priests as real people -- multifaceted people -- men who doubt, who question, who struggle, and who sometimes get together to play poker with one another. I think I'd feel at home in Saint Thomas Rectory. In fact, I felt a real strong sense of déjà-vu for the whole hour I watched the show. Those were priests like the priests I know, on that television screen. I've never known a Bing Crosby "Father O'Malley" type, but I've met my share of Father Rays and Father Leos. And the young parochial vicar looks exactly like one of our own young diocesan priests. I won't embarrass him by saying who. Just watch the show with a few issues of **The Catholic Register** at hand, and figure it out for yourself.

I liked Father Ray's homily about the proofs for the existence of God. Saint Thomas Aquinas does make some good points, but I think most priests would agree with Ray that they find proof for God's existence when they look into the faces of their parishioners. And when Ray knelt to pray with a Lena Horne record playing in the background, I was reminded of the many times that I have prayed with Betty Buckley's "Live In London" CD on the stereo. (Check out her rendition of "Bridge Over Troubled Water," or "Unchained Melody." It's a real religious experience.)

What I liked best about "Nothing Sacred" was that priests were not portrayed as amiable, befuddled buffoons who haven't got a clue as to what life is all about, or as predatory monsters bent on their own gain -- the two stereotypical depictions of priests we're usually force fed by TV and movies.

"Nothing Sacred" shows men who despite struggling with themselves and with their God, care deeply about the welfare and well being of their people. They are men who want to bring those people to God. They are men like my brother priests -- men who serve us so well. They are the kind of priest I would like to be.

By Susa

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