PROPHETS OF MERCY WITH THE LGBTI COMMUNITY

From the experience of inclusion as a constituent and vital dimension of justice, and of the proclamation of the Gospel, and the invitation to a prophetic life rooted in situations of marginalized persons, we composed this prayer to reflect about a reality that is becoming increasingly visible: the reality of the LGBTI community (lesbian, gay, transgender, bisexual, intersex); the methodology used is the SEE-JUDGE-ACT offering us a deep opening to questions that lead to a transforming action and a choice for life.

Over the years we see that those who make up this group are despised, marginalized, persecuted and even sentenced to death, because of their sexual orientation; perhaps mercy, compassion, the welcome is only for some people?

“There is no longer Jew nor Greek; neither slave nor free; neither man nor woman, since all of you are one in Jesus Christ”.

ATMOSPHERE: We propose for this prayer, to place a path lit with some candles and traces of different colors, shapes and sizes, as a symbol of our life and the diversity of people that we are finding in our journey. The invitation is to contemplate how we face these different realities; how they challenge us. We welcome these interpersonal experiences as opportunities for our journey of transformation, disseminating feelings of mercy, justice and inclusion.

OPENING PRAYER: We are aware of the presence of God, Mother and Father within us. Let us recall his always-dynamic spirit, which inspires us to focus on unity in diversity. May we feel challenged by the Gospel of Jesus, who calls us to a profound experience of sharing, and transcends differences among us. In our fully human hearts, we demonstrate acceptance and tenderness, with special predilection for the weak and the marginalized of our society.

TO SEE:

TESTIMONY: ELIZABETH (Peruvian lesbian of 22 years old)
I still remember the day when, for the first time, I discussed with fear to my mom about my sexual orientation. From that moment, she began to give me a series of warnings and told me a number of ideas which I gradually and sadly believed, thereby internalizing a lesbophobia - making me appear to be as heterosexual as possible.

When I realized that to keep faking it was only hurting myself, I plucked up the courage to tell my mom that, in my 20 years, women kept attracting me, and that was not a stage of confusion. The only thing she said was “You are selfish; you want to expose your family”. “Never say anything about this to your younger sister”. Several times she threatened to hurt me if I was still thinking of that. Since I decided “to get out of the closet”, both she and my dad treated me different. They have humiliated me. Returning home after school is almost a torture; the place where I should feel more protected, is where I feel most vulnerable. I don’t like to interact with them; I leave early and I try to come back as late as possible. The sad thing is that they are not strangers who insult me.
the street or who make me feel bad every day, but they are my own parents. I would like to be able to share my life with them, since they are my parents, but if they continue threatening me to “change”, I shall have no choice but to get away from them. Accepting myself as a lesbian has been a difficult process, but I do not think I can ever go back to hide myself. I am not only building my self-esteem, but working to help other lesbians who still feel fear.

From the prayerful reading of the testimony of this young woman, let us question:

*What feelings are aroused in you?
*What was or is your reaction to the encounter with LGBTI people?
*Have you ever wondered or noticed the darkness, stigmatization and violence to which the members of the LGBTI community are subjected?

TO JUDGE:

In Jewish society, the leper was an “impure” being (according to prejudice, human standards, laws, institutions), stigmatized, without a place in society, without welcome, excluded from normal life. Jesus challenges us, because we identify these persons with the leper. Without hesitation, he extends his hand and touches them, and moved by compassion he says “Be clean!” This is what God wants, the God Incarnate in Jesus: to cleanse the world of exclusions and judgments that go against the Father’s compassion. It is not God who marginalizes, but I, you, us.

Reading of the Gospel: Mark 1:40-45

A leper came to Jesus [and kneeling down] begged him and said, “If you wish, you can make me clean.”
Moved with pity, he stretched out his hand, touched him, and said to him, “I do will it. Be made clean.”
The leprosy left him immediately, and he was made clean.

Then, warning him sternly, he dismissed him at once.
Then he said to him, “See that you tell no one anything, but go, show yourself to the priest and offer for your cleansing what Moses prescribed; that will be proof for them.”
The man went away and began to publicize the whole matter. He spread the report abroad so that it was impossible for Jesus to enter a town openly. He remained outside in deserted places, and people kept coming to him from everywhere.

Let us question ourselves by the prayerful reading of the Gospel:

* What message is the LGBTI community hearing from us? Have we spoken to them of the welcome of Jesus?

* What is the call that we are hearing in Jesus’ attitude towards the leper?

* What things in our society are not facilitating our seeing the reality of the LGBTI community?
To go deepen: A prayer of Ryan Sumedi Hutagalung, a Christian gay from Indonesia:

“Let my life be mine, O God”.

“Every step I took was despised
Every Word that I said was lost
Without any echo
Every song that I sang became dull
Every move that I made ended in trauma
All eyes passed me by
Like shots coming from a thousand arrows
My heart is pierced by pieces of glass
That were scattered on the ground
My heart is empty, rejected
My conscience is trampled down
My spirit is broken, shattered
There is no place for me to stand up ¿
Where is the voice of justice?
At the time when I needed it most?
Whither goes the moon?
When answers are given
Without questions?

My whole world went dark
While I tried frantically to search for the light
My soul is lost in a deep sleep
Without the sun to bring in the light
Let my life be what it is
Let my step set its goals
Let my soul find its peace
Like a ship trying to find
Its destiny
You and I are of one Creator
You and I are of this one earth
You and I shared this one light
You and I shared this one gift
My God is also yours
God is the judge of my life
And of yours, also
God never leaves me
Although you left this
Misery in me
I am sure that God will protect me.
Let my life be mine
Because God is with me”

TO ACT:
*After this reflection, what is my commitment in the following of Jesus the Good Shepherd? What attitudes and/or concrete actions can I perform from the experience of welcoming, merciful love, reconciliation, justice and peace towards LGBTI people?
*Can we assume the challenge to be informed and to create awareness in our mission about this reality? What is the creative way to do it?

FINAL PRAYER

Jesus, you who dignified everyone in your path, welcoming people, loving them and freeing them from the yokes of prejudice and sin; help us to look at the world as you did, to look beyond appearances and enter into the depth of the human heart. Infuse in us the decision to only seek the good of each person, showing your love, mercy and tenderness; building the Kingdom that also calls for unity in diversity.

“Let us alleviate dehumanization in so many situations of marginality,
NO to homophobia, YES to life and dignity.”

Submitted by Cinthya Linárez Nina, Novice at the Apostolic Regional Novitiate - Ecuador

Note: In the following pages you can find some vocabulary and a title of a movie, if you wish to use them as a resource.
**CLARIFYING TERMS:**

**Sexual Orientation:** It is a sexual, emotional or romantic attraction to others. Sexual orientation can be heterosexual, homosexual, or bisexual.

The majority of scientists now agree that sexual orientation is most probably the result of a complex interaction of biological, cognitive and the environment factors. There are recent important evidence suggesting that biology, including genetic or inborn hormonal factors play an important role in a person's sexuality.

**Is Sexual Orientation a Choice?** No, human beings cannot choose to be homosexual, heterosexual or bisexual. For most people, sexual orientation emerges at the beginning of adolescence with no previous sexual experience. Although we can choose to act in accordance with our feelings, psychologists do not consider sexual orientation a conscious choice that can be voluntarily changed.

**Homosexuality:** It's a sexual orientation that is defined as the interaction or affective, emotional, sentimental and sexual attraction to individuals of the same sex.

**Gay:** Man with homosexual sexual orientation.

**Lesbian:** Female with homosexual sexual orientation.

**Bisexual:** People undergoing an affective, emotional, and sexual attraction to people of the same sex and of the opposite sex.

**Sexual Identity:** It is the conscience of a person feeling male or female membership. In other words, a person can feel a different gender identity from physiological characteristics of birth.

**Transgender:** People who in various ways are identified with the opposite gender of the physiological characteristics of birth.

**Intersex:** Person presenting an organic abnormality which presents discrepancy between their sex and their genitals, therefore possessing genetic and phenotypic characteristics of male and female, in varying degree. It was previously named with the term hermaphrodite.

Homophobia: It is aversion, irrational hatred, fear, prejudice or discrimination against gay men or women, although it also tends to include other persons who integrate sexual diversity, as is the case of the bisexual or transgender.
**International Day against Homophobia and Transphobia:**

Held on May 17 to commemorate the removal of homosexuality from the list of mental illnesses by the Assembly General of the World Health Organization (WHO), which took place on May 17, 1990. Its main objective is the coordination of all kinds of actions that serve to denounce the discrimination to which homosexuals, lesbians, bisexuals and transgender are subjected, and to advance their rights around the world.

Currently, more than 70 countries in the world criminalize homosexuality, and condemn sexual acts between persons of the same sex, with prison terms. In at least five of those countries (Mauritania, Iran, Sudan, Saudi Arabia and Yemen, in addition to parts of Nigeria and Somalia) the death penalty is utilized for these cases. The number of these countries varies over time, since some countries cease to criminalize homosexuality, while others bring new laws that condemn it. Discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity is not officially recognized by the States Members of the United Nations, despite that organizations such as the Committee on Human Rights have repeatedly condemned discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity.

**International Day of Pride LGBTI**

Also known as Gay Pride Day, it is the date on which a series of annual events are carried out, when the LGBTI community celebrates publicly, urging tolerance, equality and the dissolution of myths and prejudices, which lead to violence against the members of this group. It is usually held in late June or early July.

Note: To continue to raise awareness of LGBTI’s reality, we recommend seeing the movie "Prayers for BOBBY" (You can find it on YouTube in the following link: https://youtu.be/pvdxDsRX7hg).