



Miguel Ochoa

Lent: A Time to Reach Out to the LGBTQ Community?

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What are you giving up this year?

It is time, once again, for the infamous question to begin bouncing around from Catholic to Catholic. We are beginning the season of Lent: a time of prayer, fasting, and almsgiving. But, when the season ends and we have reached the pinnacle of our liturgical year at Easter, what happens next? Besides indulging in chocolate, french fries, and margaritas (at least here in San Antonio), what do we see in our reflection of the six weeks past? We've all heard time and time again, "Rather than giving something up, what can you *do* to help make the season more meaningful?"

During this time in our history, we find ourselves in deep anticipation of the days when we can freely and safely go out to dinner without checking to make sure we have our masks. We wonder when we can gather once again with our friends and loved ones and embrace, simply sit in one another's living rooms to talk about life's ups, downs, and everything in between, and not have to remain at least six feet apart. This time of uncertainty, of solitude, of separation, should reflect the same desire in our hearts as we long for the return of Christ in the Resurrection.

Unfortunately, these are also the words used to describe how many members of the LGBTQ community feel when asked about their relationship with the Catholic Church.

As members of the Church and the LGBTQ community, we have experienced both the solitude of Lent and the glory of the Resurrection. We both have had to endure the feelings of abandonment, loneliness, and isolation from a Church which we once believed was our home. That time in our lives was dark and left us hungry and thirsty, longing for understanding and searching for the true essence of the Body of Christ which we once knew. Thankfully, we were quickly reminded by our tight circle of friends and family, that we too were worthy of God's Agape love and had a place at the table. We were blessed and humbled, knowing that not every LGBTQ person who has been hurt by the Church has the same experience.

Now, as active members of both the Church and the MSJC LGBTQ ministry, we find ourselves called to serve individuals who, like us, have felt or are feeling the isolation and abandonment by the Body of Christ. As we enter into this solemn season, we encourage everyone to deeply consider reaching out to our LGBTQ members in the desert:

- those who have been left without food or drink to nourish their spiritual hunger and thirst
- those who have been made to feel unwelcome or marginalized
- those who have been abandoned by communities they once called home

Now is the time for these individuals to be called back, embraced, and welcomed. It is our call, in the same way we are called to serve the poor and pray for those in need during this Lenten season, to reach out and be the reflection of Christ to all we encounter, especially our LGBTQ family.

"I hope what's possible is everything (in improving the relationship between the LGBTQ community and the Church) and I hope that the LGBTQ community can feel welcome in their own church." - Fr. James Martin SJ