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On Priesting

by *Dagda*, November 2010, originally posted at <http://worthyadvisor.wordpress.com> 

In October 2003, I was in the last days of living with my coven leader and his partner, and it was pure hell. One Sunday, I left the house to get out of the way of some activity or other my coven leader was having, and I went to go get the keys to an apartment that I had found a couple of towns over. I finished up with the landlord early, and, having not much else to do, I drove around.

To say I was sick in spirit was an understatement. I needed spiritual guidance, and I didn't trust the local pagan community. I was really wary of any other pagan groups at the time because I thought information about where I would be living would get back to my coven leader.

In the town that I was going to reside in for the next year, there was a large Catholic church, complete with cloister. My roots are Catholic, so I pulled into the church parking lot and went in, hoping that if I couldn't talk to one of the priests, I'll at least be somewhere holy. (I have a thing for churches, actually, and love stained glass windows, of which this church had in plenty.)

I opened the door as quietly as I good, and as it was Sunday afternoon, there was a baptism going on. I tucked myself into one of the rooms in the back of the church that are reserved for mothers with babies, and just watched. At this point, I figured that even after the baptism, I probably wouldn't get to talk to the priest, so I stayed through the service, thinking I'd find the Mary shrine later, light a candle, and be done with it.

But after the service I didn't go to find the Mary shrine, I just walked into the main part of the church and sat in a pew for awhile. I was tired, hurting, and just didn't have the energy to do much else. Part of me was also hoping that it would be like in the movies where the priest will come out and walk down the aisle, sitting down with me and offering sage advice.

I also didn't know who to pray to. I'd been told I'd been praying incorrectly. Honestly, I didn't know who to pray to, or even if those prayers would be answered. All I knew is that, if I could, I wanted to talk to another priest. I wanted to know if all priests were like my coven leader, or if he was the exception. So, I just sat there. I don't remember for how long. When I started to get up to leave, one of the nuns came walking through.

"Oh! Hello! Did you need something?" she said.

"Uh.....I'd like to talk to the priest...um...yeah..."

"Oh, well, why don't you come with me."

She led me to a side room, and had me sit down with her. She was pretty ancient, even for a nun. "So," she said, "why do you want to talk to the priest?" And, for some reason, just that question, had me open up to her and tell her all the things that had happened with my coven leader. She listened to me, even though she did try to say that I shouldn't be involved with "that kind of thing" and that I should come back to the Church. I told her that I didn't know if I would or not, but I would still like to talk to the priest. I had a need to hear from someone who actually priests for a living that I wasn't crazy and wasn't doing the wrong thing by leaving. There must have been something in the way I looked, because she nodded and said to wait while she went to find him.

When the priest came, he was a middle aged man. He had a very calm spirit and gentle personality. He didn't try to get me to come to the church, he didn't try to tell me I was going to Hell, he just listened while

I told him my story. He asked some questions, but mostly, he just listened to me until I asked him questions. Was I right to leave? Will the gods abandon me? Was my coven leader really a priest?

I remember him telling me that things would be ok, and that, from what I had told him, it was a good thing that I was getting out of the situation that I was in. He didn't know whether my gods had abandoned me or not, but he felt that, at these times, God was closer to us than any other time. He also thought that my coven leader wasn't a priest because a real priest, one who cares about those he works for, would not demand what he did of me.

There was more that day, that I've since forgotten, but even on that rainy Sunday, I felt that the goddess sent me to where I needed to be. I needed to be listened to by a fellow priest, and one who didn't judge me just because I happened to be Wiccan. This is one of my core beliefs about priesting: I will minister to everyone who comes to me seeking help. The best priests I have ever encountered before and since didn't turn me away because I was a different religion from them. They listened. They gave advice. They tended to my spirit. They gave prayers when I gave them permission. They didn't care what I believed because I was a person in need, and they were there to answer that need.

One of the major faults of the pagan community at this time is that they are incredibly insular. It is easy to call yourself a priest, but ministering to yourself, or to only the pagan community, is not enough. In fact, I believe that it is incredibly unbalanced. I've met many priests and priestesses who are more than willing to care for a fellow pagan, but ask them to care for a Christian or a Muslim, and they will rail against the many faults of these faiths and give a long litany as to why they are bad. They will ignore the fact that someone is in front of them needing their services. Or they will ignore a Christian group reaching out to them purely because of the fact they are Christian. I've even seen other pagan groups profess to be "real [witches, pagans, sorcerers, magickians, etc]" and profess to "love all beings of the Goddess" (meaning all people), and then discriminate against their fellow beings (certain strains of Dianic witchcraft come to mind here).

So, if you're going to call yourself a priest, be a priest. Forgiveness and acceptance may be hard, but it's worth it and necessary.



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