

Shameless Theology

S2:10 - Catholic Priestess and Godmother of the Disappeared with Rosa Manriquez

Rev. Alba Onofrio | 00:10

Welcome to Shameless Theology, a space for honest, courageous conversations with queer, trans, and feminist people of faith and our allies. This podcast is brought to you by Soulforce, who is an international organization working to end the religious and political oppression of LGBTQIA plus people and all marginalized people by breaking open the ideologies of white Christian supremacy. I'm Reverend Alba Onofrio, also known as Reverend Sex. I'm the Executive Director at Soulforce, and I am honored and delighted to be your host as we dive into the thick of it.

This season is exciting because it goes deep on the ideas of our brand new book called Spiritual Violence, Religious Phenomena That Defile the Faith. Together we'll learn new concepts like spiritual trauma, religious abuse, spiritual terrorism, white Christian supremacy, and spiritual violence. Together we name the harm, not as abstract theories but as lived realities. But we don't stop there because theory work is only as good as the path it leads to healing, and we'll be doing plenty of that too. These conversations are part idea session, part theological reflection, and part testimony.

You'll hear stories of resilience, liminality, code switching, theological imagination, and a kind of dogged, persevering hope that refuses to let go of the sacred, even when our institutions fail us. Whether you're here because you have questions, or because you are healing, teaching, leading, or simply trying to make sense of your own experience, you are so very welcome here. You are not alone on this journey. Now let's get down to business, and pleasure, with Shameless Theology. Y'all, this episode is so good, I can't even tell you, you're just gonna have to listen to it for yourself.

Today we'll get to hear from Rosa Manriquez in a conversation that was so beautiful and so moving that she had me just full of tears and emotion the entire time. I literally cried through half of it. She is somebody's mama and somebody's abuela, and her protective force is something that covers so many. She manages to honor her daughters, both of whom are lesbians and married, so now she has four daughters and her granddaughters, and she simultaneously is this very abuela voice and concurrently is challenging the entire Roman Catholic Church, and offering mercy and grace for ICE agents who are literally disappearing people.

I mean, this is just the best of what it means to be in the community of Las Envergonzas, and caring about the whole person, not just titles or roles or scholarship. And from the time she was young, she has insisted on being able to participate in ministry and in her call, and that persistence through call to becoming a Roman Catholic priest, it's just something that we should all take note of and try to embody. To this day, she's an organizer for justice with the Godmothers of the Disappeared on the steps of the Federal Building in Los Angeles.

She is an inspiration and has all of my admiration and love. I am honored to introduce to you Rosa Manriquez. Hi, good morning.

Rosa Manriquez | 04:03

Good morning. Good morning.

Rev. Alba Onofrio | 04:05

Thank you so much for being with us today. I am over the moon to have you on our English podcast because we had done Spanish many years ago, and you are one of our favorite guests from the staff, from our community. We just hear over and over again that you are a voice that our families need to hear from, that we need to hear from. And I've known you for many, many years, and I am so excited that you get to be on this shameless theology podcast.

So thank you for being here. Thank you. Thank you for having me. Oh my goodness. I'm so glad you're here. I feel loved. You are so loved. You are so, so loved. Okay, we're going to jump in with the same question as always. Do you identify as a Sinvergonza? Why or why not? And for people in this community, they may not speak Spanish. So will you tell us a little bit about what your understanding is? What shameless in the Sinvergonza sense in our culture means to you?

And what is your experience with it now or earlier? Tell us about Sinvergonza.

Rosa Manriquez | 05:03

Oh, I do identify very much in my family. Growing up, hearing myself being called a Sinvergonza, I kind of took issue with it. It was almost like, what do I have to be ashamed of? You know, because the Sinvergonza was not quite fitting the mold of the relationship of a child to the elders and all the rest. You know, you're not supposed to question if anything, if the elders are speaking, what are you doing in the room? And there would simply be the toss of head, which meant out.

But for me, it was like, no, I want to hear what's going on. And I've got an opinion, right? And in a sense, it came up even recently of, I guess, you know, what I hold on to. It was at the church that I attend. It's Dolores Mission in Boyle Heights. Maybe some folks who are listening recognize it as being where Fr. Greg Boyle is from. And the group, the Social Justice Organizing Committee, we had an icebreaker. And the icebreaker going around the room was simply, tell us what is your favorite fruit and, you know, why do you identify with it?

And I thought, oh, that's interesting. And so people were doing regular things, you know, fresa, mango, this kind of thing. And the wicked little voice in my head, the one that has never gone away, says, you know what fruit it is. And I thought, oh my God, okay, fine. And they got to me and I told them, well, to tell you the truth, manzana de la discordia. And they started laughing. And I said, hear me out, hear me out. I said, I might as well say that's my favorite because that's what I was called so often as a child.

Ahí viene la manzana de la discordia, which in English means the apple discord. In other words, the apple that caused all the problems between Adam and me. So yes, I identify.

Rev. Alba Onofrio | 07:21

And now you're the elder. We were talking about you with your granddaughter, who's about the same age as my daughter. And so now what do you think about that energy or that culture of having elders be in the room and being told you're supposed to get out and now you have little ones around you when you're the elder in the room?

Rosa Manriquez | 07:40

I think, honestly, I love being a grandmother. And I admit it. I love that feeling of, here I am. And I know so much. Yet, I'm eager to hear what they're thinking of. Because recently, I read again, a poem, a piece by Khalid Gibran about the future and the children of the future and that they're living a life that I don't understand or know even in my dreams. And I'm thinking, I want a taste of that. And I'm not going to get it if I don't listen to them.

Even if I disagree, or even if I'm afraid, all of a sudden, God knows I'm afraid for my grandchildren right now. And I want to tell them to beware. And so for myself, for instance, you know, my oldest granddaughter, and all three of them are kind of like her. I thought, well, my kids are raised in a bougie Mexico. And I wish they were not doing that. I wish this child did not have the valley girl accent. And, you know, she's being raised here in East LA.

So she knows what goes on in the world, in the barrio. But we did purposely, elementary school was here in the barrio in Boyle Heights, in one of the poorest, if not the poorest parish in Los Angeles. And there was a reason for that. We wanted her to understand. Yes, you get to go and eat sushi at the Revolving Sushi, but there are people that don't have the life you have. And you need to understand what that is and never forget where you came from.

But for the high school, we thought, now they have to prepare to be able to compete, unfortunately, the way that this, this culture, this dominant culture competes in order for them to get the education they need to live a life where they have a choice of what they want to do, and that they don't end up doing because they do something because they have to. And so she goes to Immaculate Heart High School. And I was very happy with that, because the women there at Immaculate Heart, I heard someone say that at one girls high school that she had gone to, that the women there were being trained to find a husband and be a good wife.

Whereas there at Immaculate Heart High School, she was being trained to be a woman to find her own life. And so I sent her there. Well, I pushed for it. And they did. And she said yes, which made me happy. And my daughter is sending her there. But I still thought, okay, she's still with Valley Girls. And there's still some bougie-ness in this whole thing, right? In fact, right now, she was carrying around a Trader Joe's bag. And I found out, well, they all are carrying around canvas bags from grocery stores.

Fine. Okay. It turned out that on one of the demonstration days, I forgot which one it was, that she helped organize a demonstration from her school in front of Griffith Park, holding signs about ICE out of LA, about repression is not patriotism, don't get it confused. And we recently got a publication from the high school that they send out occasionally. And on the front page is a picture of my granddaughter holding her sign up. And how did that feel for you?

She's yelling, right? And I just thought, oh, my goodness. Yeah. Okay. So we've gotten there. Yes. So I'll share this morning, taking her to school. She had been wanting to go to this one place that we like. And believe it or not, it's a vegan coffee shop in East LA, run by Latine women. And it's really good. And while we were there, we were looking at all of the postings on the wall, all concerning what is needed here in the barrio.

And her mother, my daughter, told her she must get confirmed as a Catholic, which I object to completely. In fact, I even told my daughter, I did not force you to become a Catholic. And she said,

well, my daughter's going to be a Catholic. Great. Great. And so the thought hit me as we were there in the cafe. And I told her, you know, if you become a Catholic, and she kind of snarled back at me, I'm going to have to.

I said, okay, if you become a Catholic, you can choose a confirmation name, you know. I said, how about Donancine? And she got this big smile on her face. And I thought, attagirl. Yeah. Tell us about what Donancine means. Donancine is the original name of Guadalupe. She is the mother goddess. And where Juan Diego was told to build a chapel where she could hear her children, where people could come, and she would hold them in the crook of her arm, is where Donancine was venerated.

So really, her full name is Guadalupe Donancine, or Donancine Guadalupe. And it just, I felt really good because I thought, okay, good. You're not going to be a bougie. Good.

Rev. Alba Onofrio | 13:44

You know, I do have a question of how our people can sell out El Pueblo to be working with La Migra. And we aren't protected even just by working with the government. We aren't protected. There's so many getting arrested themselves. And I think we are told this lie that if we give up our culture, we give up our language, we give up where we come from, and pretend to be as white as we possibly can, that there's safety in that. And that's just absolutely not true ever.

Rosa Manriquez | 14:12

No, no, it's not. It's a lie. And folks fall for it. And I really feel for those who are ICE agents, police departments, but mostly right now, ICE agents, because it's like, you all are ignorant people of color of what has happened over and over and over again in history and in different parts of the world by regimes and despots and dictators who kidnap and brainwash and recruit children. And they do it to make them into child soldiers to turn around and murder their own parents and massacre their own pueblos.

And this is what's happening to you. And your payment, you may think, is in money. It's not. It's going to be in trauma and shame for the rest of the generation. Yes, blood money. And if you stop to think, okay, well, let me explain something. Shortly after we talk here, I'm going to be going to the federal building because I am part of a group that I helped organize. We're called the Godmothers of the Disappeared. And when all of this happened, of the ICE agents doing the sweeps, the detentions and the disappearances, I thought about, you know, same thing happened, I thought, in Argentina.

I looked it up. And that's where Las Madres de la Plaza de Mayo formed. And it was simply, return our children to us. Let us know where our children are at. And they demanded to do it. I thought, I think we can do the same, but I don't want us to take the name. I think that would not be respectful. And so the group of women that got together, we chose Godmothers of the Disappeared. And we decided that we're going to be doing a vigil every Tuesday at 12 noon in front of the federal building in downtown LA, which is the area where people go for their first hearing, and where they are detained until they are sent somewhere else, or they can get bailed out, which is rare.

And we decided we're doing this, inspired by Las Madres de la Plaza de Mayo. And we want there to be three things understood by our presence. The first is, yes, the demand to return those people that have been detained and disappeared. The second one is that we are saying out loud, that it is an illusion. It is a sin. It is a tactic that is being used to foment divisiveness among everyone here in

the United States. There is no us versus them.

There is no bad guy versus good guy. There is no red versus blue. There is no Republican versus Democrat. When it comes down to it, we're all human beings. And the third is to the ICE agents, again, you know, telling them, we see you. We're mothers, too. We see you. And we know that you are the children that wanted to grow up to be heroes and champions and warriors and protectors, and that you just might think that that's what you're doing by being ICE agents, or coming in the National Guard or the military, the police to harm others like this.

But we're telling you this is not the way. It's not the way. And it's not too late. Put down your arms. Take off the masks. Refuse to be part of the oppression. Just refuse. And we've even talked to a few of them and mentioned out loud in our vigils the difference between that person who's selling oranges in an orange cart and you taking people off the streets. Compare both of them. And what is the difference? The difference is that that orange cart vendor is contributing to the community and to society.

They spend their money here in the United States, in their neighborhood, and they create dreams from that orange cart to a little go-go cart to a little shop they are creating. Whereas with you, you're destroying families, and you're tearing them apart, and you're traumatizing. One is constructive. The other is destructive. We're telling you, choose life.

Rev. Alba Onofrio | 18:58

You have me in tears over here. I would love to talk a little bit about the amazing woman that you are and your journey to be able to be doing this. And I know you're very humble, and you feel sometimes like it's silly to ask over and over again, but I always want to hear the story and I think our community does too. You're not just any Mexican senora, grandmother over there in East LA in the barrio. You are an ordained Roman Catholic priestess.

And that is something that for most of our listeners is not a possibility. You are a woman. You've always identified as a woman. So I would love for you to tell us a little bit more about that. How was that possible? And how have you held onto your faith?

Rosa Manriquez | 19:49

Well, so I am Roman Catholic from cradle and until I die or I get kicked out. Supposedly, I'm kicked out, but I ain't kicked out. They're going to keep J.D. Vance. You bet they're going to keep me. And so I did the whole thing, you know, from first grade all the way through college with a Catholic education. My teachers were the Immaculate Heart Sisters who, amazing, amazing women. There is a documentary out called Rebel Hearts, R-E-B-E-L, Rebel Hearts. And it's about how they ended up basically telling the Cardinal of Los Angeles shortly after Vatican II that his demands for them to go back into the habit and to become, you know, these sweet little nuns as opposed to very highly educated women that they could not do that in good conscience.

And so he kicked them, he forced them out of the convents and schools onto the street. That's the story of Rebel Hearts. Those were my teachers. Good lineage. The high school that my granddaughter goes to, it was founded by them. During her freshman year, in fact, this is an idea of what their teaching was like. They had four banners coming down from the second floor of one of their buildings. The fourth banner had written on it, empowerment, not indoctrination. And there's a

bumper sticker going around on some of the cars there when we get in the line to pick up our girls.

And the bumper sticker is, may I raise daughters who are ungovernable. Amen. I want that with all my heart. Those are the women who taught me. My grandmother was a good model to me of being a Catholic. She and her sister were the only ones who remained Catholic in their family and their siblings because of a run-in that her siblings and that she, they had with a Roman Catholic priest back in Puebla concerning their mother. And it's an interesting story. I won't go into it too much, except for that to be said.

So she raised us in Catholicism. And it was an interesting way, because although we observed mass, rosaries, the Mexican holidays, all of this, right? If some priest said something completely outrageous and crazy, it was like the sí, padrecito, lo que usted diga, padrecito. Yes, Father, whatever you say, Father. And we'd come home and it was like, did you hear what he said? Are we going to? He's crazy. Just ignore that part. Ignore that. No, that's not happening. That's how I was raised.

And it really is a love for Catholicism, but Catholicism al estilo Mexicano de la gente indígena. So like my grandmother had her altar. In this bedroom that I'm talking to you, she had two altars over two corners of the house. My bed is under one of those corners and I have my own little altar now. So I was raised with that. When I was in elementary school, the boys were allowed to be altar servers. I was sad because I had memorized the mass in Latin.

Of course you had. I was so excited. I could not be an altar server. But the girls were told, you can be in the choir. And the choir loft, it was remarkable. It was way up high. And this is a cathedral. So we could see everything that was going on all the way down. And we learned all kinds of masses in Latin and English, including a mass of ordination for priests. And up till then, the only thought I ever had that was a hint to me of what I wanted to do was when I would play with my cousins and a neighbor girl.

And kids play all kinds of things when you're pretending. I played the mass. Of course you did. And I got, you know, my cousins and my sister and we set up the boxes for an altar and I'd pound out window bread into a hose and get aluminum and make a little chalice and put water in there. And, you know, we would play. One day, one of my cousins, Bobby, who I tussled all the time, he got upset and yelled at me, you can't do that.

You're a girl. And I told him I'm the oldest. So shut up. So back to the choir loft. So we did that mass of ordination and it was long. But when the priests were laying down on the ground and I got to look at them, I felt like, I want to do that. I just, I want to do that. And as I learned more and more, you can't do that. You're a woman. I kept thinking to myself, well, I'll try and get as close as I can.

But throughout my life, I still kept getting hints all the time of being called to be a priest.

Rosa Manriquez | 26:03

No matter how much I did, that I thought, well, this will be enough. I'll be happy with doing this, with teaching confirmation.

Rosa Manriquez | 26:09

No.

Rosa Manriquez | 26:10

I'll be happy with reading the gospel. No. You know, I'll be happy. It just wasn't enough. And two things came up, and there were more than that, but signs of, come on, be a priest. Okay. One was, I became very dissatisfied with the work that I was doing, not because of the work itself, but because of the supervisors and the head of the department. I work for recreation and parks. Love it. Love it. Love it. Love it. But I thought I have to move on.

So I got my income tax return money, and I used it to go to a vocational center that used to be close to UCLA. Spent my whole check there trying to find out what am I suited for? Where's the job market? Do I need more education? And in those days, computers were kind of in the stone age. And so you would get your answer on paper that would collapse on each other, until you had a stack of paper. And so I had my second to last counseling session with a vocational counselor.

And he sits down, he got all the results from the intelligence tests and everything. And he says, well, we have here, you are most suited to be a camp director. I'm already in recreation thinking, okay, thanks a lot. What's next? He said, according to this, to be a priest or a minister. I tell him that is very hard when you are a Catholic woman. And I just walked out of the thing to myself once again, God, you're a wise guy.

Rev. Alba Onofrio | 28:00

Yes. Oh my gosh.

Rosa Manriquez | 28:02

You are a comedian, aren't you? That's a nice way to put it. You are so freaking funny. That's one. The other one, there was a time there, and I was just getting traumatized at that stage of my life, where I thought, I'm doing everything, except I'm not a Eucharistic minister, giving communion, because it hurts too much to know that this is as close as I'm going to get. And that's it. You know what, God? That's it. I'm done. I'm done. I'm done.

No way. You will make a way, but you haven't made a way for a woman to be ordained a priest. So I am done. And this is going five days a week to Mass, little bit of people there. And there was usually this one married couple that would help distribute communion at that Mass. And so I was kneeling there, and yeah, I'm arguing with God pretty much. You're breaking up with your boyfriend. And I looked up and the priest, it was time to distribute.

He looks around, the couple's not there. And he turns around and he looks at me and he goes, no. And he goes, come here to distribute communion. Oh my goodness. So I was at a retreat, an Advent retreat with my community, the Immaculate Heart community. And one of our new members got up and she announced to everyone that she had been ordained a Roman Catholic priest. And up until then, I had put it all away. And I had said, you know, God, here's the deal.

If you can find a way for me to be ordained with apostolic succession, which would mean I would be a Roman Catholic priest. I'll say yes. But until then, no. And she got up and said, you know, that she did this through Roman Catholic woman priest. And she explained how it was apostolic succession. Most of my sisters in the room only heard you did what? You got ordained a Roman Catholic priest. The only thing I heard was an apostolic succession.

Rev. Alba Onofrio | 30:25

Yes. Will you tell us a little bit about what that is for folks who might not know?

Rosa Manriquez | 30:30

Apostolic succession means that the ordination, the laying of hands, can be traced all the way back to Peter and Jesus. Yes.

Rev. Alba Onofrio | 30:40

And that's where the power comes from. Yes. Right. Direct.

Rosa Manriquez | 30:45

That it can go all the way. Like roots. Like the roots can be traced all the way to the truth. And so, you know, I talked with her and I started making my inquiries. And yeah, I followed through and it was very hard. But one way or another, each roadblock just fell away, fell away and fell away. And so I was ordained. I knew I was going to be excommunicated, which is so silly. At this point, I figure I should have ordered a catering service for my excommunication.

And my dear mom, who is the only person in my lifetime that I have ever had the fear of God of. The day before, no, the day of, she already knew I was going to go and get ordained. Had no opinion one way or the other. And she was disabled. She was in bed. She had been like that for years. Always saw her rosary on the television. Always saw her mass on the television. Her novelas on the television. And I went in that morning.

I told her, Mom, I'm going to go now. I'm going to the ordination. I'm going to be ordained. And she said, OK, that's good. I said, Mom, I'm going to be excommunicated. And it was the second time I told her this. Not that day, but second time telling her. And she just says, turn off the TV. And she tells me in English, Rose, you worry over the stupidest things. You're going to be excommunicated. You answered me a question. If there was someone who was dying or was in a bad way or their baby was in a bad way and they came to you and they said, please, I want to be baptized or baptize this child and you baptize them.

Would that still be good? And I thought about that. Uh, yeah. And she says, well, you're not excommunicated. Now turn on the TV and leave.

Rev. Alba Onofrio | 33:02

So I'm a priest. Yes. So what a practical way of seeing not the infrastructure, but the center of the purpose of ministry, which is to provide with a mantle of God, the hope and the comfort to the people.

Rosa Manriquez | 33:19

Yes. The institution does not take precedent over the call itself. And I know there are priests and all sorts of people, cardinals and such that would argue with me, but I stand by that. No, it does not. As far as not being allowed to celebrate mass, at least here in Los Angeles, to me, the structure of that church. Yeah. I can be told you cannot celebrate mass here, but on the sidewalk in front, no one can tell me I cannot celebrate mass.

And the only difference is that there is a deed to the property in the building of that church. And the name on that deed is the Archbishop of Los Angeles. So of course he can say who can do what in that building, but he can't say that I cannot celebrate mass.

Rev. Alba Onofrio | 34:13

That's right.

Rosa Manriquez | 34:14

That's not up to him.

Rev. Alba Onofrio | 34:15

Amen.

Rosa Manriquez | 34:15

So if I'm there on the street doing it and people are coming, oh well, you'll get over it.

Rev. Alba Onofrio | 34:21

That's right. I know for many years you celebrate, there's this big conference each year called Creating Change that gathers LGBT people from around the country. And I know one of the cornerstones of that conference to be you holding a mass for LGBT people. And that is part of how I came to know you. So will you tell us a little bit about what does mass mean to you? What does that look like in a space like that? You yourself don't identify as queer or maybe you're...

So you got involved all up in this with us for years and years now. You've been a part of the spiritual care team with us. So will you tell us a little bit about what it means to you to have mass, to hold mass, to celebrate mass, to sacralize a space for LGBT folks that in general, we've been told we aren't welcome. We're not allowed to celebrate the sacrament of Eucharist. Tell us about that for you.

Rosa Manriquez | 35:22

It is the most precious thing for me. It is the custom in the Roman Catholic Church that the first mass that a newly ordained priest celebrates is extremely important. Where it's celebrated, you know, who receives the first blessings, you know, and all the rest of this. My first mass was at Creating Change.

Rev. Alba Onofrio | 35:51

In our community. Yeah.

Rosa Manriquez | 35:56

And it was really great because we, and by we, I mean the people present at that place of Creating Change helped to put together the pieces of the mass and the music. And they read the pieces of the mass. They proclaimed the gospel. They gave communion to each other. Right. And it felt so good. Yeah. It really felt so, so good. That very first one, I was just curious why people were there. Yes. And who was in the room. And almost, it was like almost without an exception of the 17 or so people that were there, each one in some way or another had been a Catholic.

Yes. Not a practicing Catholic at the time, quote practicing Catholic, but had been a Catholic. And I remember there was one woman there who had worked for her diocese, or I think it was her parish, for years and years and years and years. And then she had sent out an invitation to a wedding shower for, I think it was her daughter, lesbian daughter, who was getting married, the two of them. And they dismissed her after years and years and years of service.

And I just thought this is, it's ridiculous. I told people to me, this is a place of gratitude. This is a place of sustenance. This is a welcoming table. To me, the day someone can tell me who Jesus said, you back away from this table, or I'm not going to feed you, is the day that I'll say, okay, but you can't find that because he never did. And so to me, and I've said this to people, to tell you that you are not worthy, first of all, to sit at the table with everyone else who's your kin, is a lie.

That means that that person lied to you. They lied to you. This was made for you. This was made for all of us. And so, you know, we went down the line and, you know, it was so touching. And at one point, when people were talking about their experiences, and I think it was after the mass, a very good friend of mine, Lee Smith Melendez Rivera, who I adore. I love her. Another sin vergüenza. Oh, I love Lee Smith. She was sitting right next to me.

And this one woman said how very, very touched she was to see a lesbian woman celebrating mass. And I was about to say something and Liz Smith got my hand and she just goes, don't, you know, like that. Oh, she said, no, no, let her have it. I won't tell her. I don't want to lie. It's true.

Rev. Alba Onofrio | 39:27

But I'm honorary because I produce lesbian dolls. Yes, that's the next piece I want to jump into if you're ready. Because not only are you exceptional for your perseverance to the call that you received from God as a child that was not going to be deterred, and you stuck with it until you found a way. So many of us, we feel like we don't have a choice. We have to leave, we have to escape, we have to try a different path.

But the fact that you've held on to that and said, no, this is my birthright, this is my tradition. And I'm going to trust that God's going to open a way, but I'm also not going to just live into my own suffering until I do that. And then God shows this magical woman in your space who's like, I've been ordained and that starts you down that path. But you come to this in a way that so many people, another way that people leave the church is when somebody in their family or a close loved one comes out of the closet as LGBT, and they feel like they have to choose between their faith, their religious practice, their religious community, and their loved one.

And so many of our families have chosen their faith and their religion and kicked us out or excluded us or just agreed to disagree. And you come from an entirely different place. So will you talk a little bit about being a mother and being a priest and your faith? How do those things work together? You are absolutely honorary, not just once, but twice over. So do tell, do tell. Well, okay.

Rosa Manriquez | 41:05

So first of all, my children's father was gay and I didn't know that. And he was in the closet and he never came out of the closet except when he abandoned our family and left stuff behind. And I was going through it. Yeah, I found the love letters and I found the photos. And so, you know, I have to tell you that was very difficult to deal with. I was so hurt and people use the word, oh, I was devastated so easily.

No, I was devastated. It was hard. And at that point I had my two daughters. But there was something in me that realized you're going to have to come to terms with this person and the experience because every single day you are going to see his face in the faces of your children. And you're going to have to resolve whatever it is that's in you because otherwise these poor kids are going to feel that resentment, that anger, that dark negativity in you.

And so I did an awful lot of work, a lot of praying and going to people to help me figure this out and counseling and retreats. And I really did get finally to the place of, you know, this person was not an angel or a demon. He wasn't a sinner. He wasn't a saint. He was a human being. And we human beings can do beautiful, glorious, divine actions and experiences. And we you know, he was in the closet for God knows why and no one deserves that.

And if anything, I actually got the better portion. He did not.

Rev. Alba Onofrio | 43:22

That's right. But that's enough to make so many people, so many other people closing on themselves and just hate gay people. Like that experience of being abandoned, that devastation, you chose to have that be something you worked on and healed, but so many go the other way.

Rosa Manriquez | 43:43

I have to, because I had to, because I already knew, I had learned from my religious upbringing with the Immaculate Heart Sisters, that what you feed is what's going to grow. Amen. What you feed is what you grow. That, and if you feed that angry element within you over and over again, it will grow and become destructive. And eventually it will be self-consuming and there will be none of yourself left. You'll just be a shell. And I didn't want that for myself.

And I certainly didn't want that for my children. They didn't need, they'd already been abandoned by their dad. They didn't need their mother to abandon them because she gave all her energy to this negativity. That's right. Right. And don't confuse me, like I'm no saint though, I'm human. And like, I was more than broke, right? There were some very hard times being a single mom, very hard times. And every once in a while, I tell him, think to myself, yeah, I don't hold him.

You know, the day this person passes away and I pass away, I'm telling God, I'm not holding him bound. God, please, all of this, it's all forgiven. But if I could only see him once and just give him a good hard clip to him. And then look at him and say, how the hell are you doing, Henny? Because it's just a little bit of anger.

Rev. Alba Onofrio | 45:20

Just a little bit.

Rosa Manriquez | 45:22

Just a little bit. And so when my daughters were in high school, my youngest daughter, she is a kind of a person, she's like emotion incarnated. Whatever she feels, you know it. You know what she's feeling. So like, if she's happy, oh, it's great. You know, we crank up music, people are joking, we're cooking, you know, it's a good time. She's in a good mood. If she's not in a good mood, we know there's clouds that come across the sun, the animals go and hide, you know.

She's not in a good mood. So one day she came home from school and she was quiet. She was quiet. And I thought, oh dear, this is different. And she came up to me and she was really worried. She was like, kind of trembling. She says, mom, I have something to tell you, but don't get mad. And I thought, oh hell, she's pregnant. I thought, okay, take a breath. And she was telling me over and over again, mom, please don't get mad.

And you know, I was trying to think, well, please, what could it be? And we live in East Los Angeles. And I thought, please God, tell me that she's not involved in drugs and she didn't burn some drug dealer and they're going to come and shoot up the house.

Rev. Alba Onofrio | 46:55

Please God. All the things that could be running through your mind.

Rosa Manriquez | 46:58

Yeah, all these horrible things. And she finally said, mom, don't get mad. I like girls. I date girls. And by that time she was just sobbing away. She could hardly breathe. And what struck me was, first of all, my child's in pain. She's crying. And, you know, I realized, oh my God, this is the same child that's been telling me now for years that she has no father, that she hates her father. And she knew he was gay, that she's a vegetable.

And I just thought, oh my God. And I felt really bad because I thought, and she thinks you're going to hate her. And so, you know, I did my best to soothe her. And I told her, you know, yes, I pray for you. You are a jewel. You're precious. And, you know, I talked to her and I tried to counsel her. And, you know, I still think it's hard for a parent who's straight to try and counsel a child who is queer, gay, lesbian, or bi, or trans, because it's an experience, a reality that I don't understand.

I don't know. I don't have that experience. But I did try. I tried to counsel her. And there was one thing, if I could change, I would. But at the time I was afraid for her. And I wouldn't have told her, just be careful who you tell. It wasn't right. It wasn't right then. It isn't right now. Because if my daughter was straight, I would never have told her, be careful who you tell. I told her because I was afraid of what could happen to her.

I shared that once with Lizbeth, Lizbeth Melendez Rivera, Lizbeth. And I told her I feel guilty for having told my child that. And she said, you have to understand, at that point, your daughter was ready to come out of the closet. You were not ready to be the parent of a lesbian daughter. So she had walked a path that you were just at the very beginning of. You know, so that was her story. Her sister's story was different. Her sister would have gone to her grave not telling me she was a lesbian.

But her sister outed her.

Rev. Alba Onofrio | 49:58

Oh, sisters. Exactly.

Rosa Manriquez | 50:00

Her sister was very angry at her over something, pretty much came out of the bedroom and told me, she has something to say to you. And she tells her sister, and if you don't tell her, I will. And then she walks away. So that's how that went.

Rev. Alba Onofrio | 50:20

So many parents act from a place of fear. And that makes sense because I think we're writing this coming out resource just to help folks feel a little bit more bolstered in our community. And one of the things that feels important to say is that we as LGBT people have feelings in our bones, in our bodies, in our deep knowing that is a yes or a no, that helps us know what is right for us, that I believe is the gift of the Holy Spirit in our beings telling us yes or no.

And straight people don't have that. So they have to trust us when we say this is who we are. But I know that just like Lisbeth told you, there's a different process for a parent, for a loved one who feels protective and scared. And thankfully, that came out as something that was protective. And so many times it comes out as anger or insults or judgment. And that is something that I hope that with time, our families and our communities can see in a different way.

Because I know so many of us have lost our families because of that fear that sounds like anger, judgment, insults, but deep under there is such deep fear for people that they love.

Rosa Manriquez | 51:40

Yeah. And those people who go to religious scripture and they point to it as a way to try and maybe push their loved one, and they're probably still loved, into the closet, it's their own fear radiating out, not being able to get a handle on their own fear, on my own fear. For some, I guess it's directed at the person who's telling you the deepest part of their being. Yeah. And so, there may be this thought, if I get angry enough, I can scare them back and they'll be safe.

For myself, actually, it's mostly, yeah, I can be angry, but not angry at my children, angry at what may be out there and realizing that there's a part of me that's very primal, really primal. There's a mother part of me, I swear to God, you'd lay a finger on my child, you are going down.

Rev. Alba Onofrio | 52:48

Yes, yes.

Rosa Manriquez | 52:49

You are going down. But that's still the fear being manifested, just in a different way. So, for those who are looking to the religious texts and all, in particular, oh, I hate it, too, the prodigal son. And where they say that this, it's always a boy, comes back to the father, and I've sinned, I've sinned, I don't deserve you, I'm changing, I'm going to be everything you wanted me to be. It's like you missed the whole point of the story. That wasn't the point of the story.

The point of the story is the unconditional love that father has. Say that. That's the point of the story. Because if you read it, again, you'll realize, as that child is apologizing and desperately trying to get back to this place of love, of being loved, of feeling the love, and is apologizing and apologizing, this parent isn't even listening because that parent's too busy giving out orders and directions to have a party because the child's returned. The apology, the whole thing of to be forgiven, no, that's not the important part.

The important part is this is what unconditional love looks like. And even to the point of going to others who may be judging this child harshly, and then judging you as whatever, a fool or whatever, for having that unconditional love, because the parent goes to the sibling, right? And there's another thing. That sibling, that quote son, in the way that the Jewish and Hebrew writings are, has committed a worse sin than his brother, because he has criticized his father. And you don't do that without being stoned to death.

A child does not criticize the parent, does not go against the parent. Leviticus tells the parent that child can be stoned to death for having disrespected the parent, the father. So that child did that. And again, unconditional love. He's not even looking at that, at the child that's not going to apologize for the transgression, or at the child that is apologizing for the transgression. The point is that this parent loves them both unconditionally. And this one who has criticized you, you're reasoning with them and counseling them, and trying to bring them to life by saying, look, you know, we thought your brother was dead, and he's alive.

Celebrate. And with the other one not listening, because you're here, we got to celebrate that. First things first. Let's celebrate. Let's be together. And I would say to those people, you're reading it all wrong.

Rev. Alba Onofrio | 56:13

Yes. So how did you get from that moment where you're fearful, you clearly love your daughter, that doesn't change at all. But now part of your activism is in faith community, is this marrying of the faith community and this mama bear for so many of us in the LGBT community. How did that, how did you go from that fear to this place where we see you every year in queer spaces, holding masses, providing comfort, showing us what is possible? How'd that happen?

Rosa Manriquez | 56:55

My youngest daughter was going to Cal State. And she heard a speaker from an organization called GLIDE. And it's not the one that most of us are familiar with. This is another one. It's no longer in existence. GLIDE stood for Gays and Lesbians Initiating Dialogue for Equality. And it was a speaker's bureau. And it was gay folks of all types. And training to go and speak at different schools, high schools, colleges, with business people, just at different places, to talk about the causes of homophobia and the impact of homophobia on communities.

And there are a few pillars of homophobia, for instance, sexism. Where you find sexism, you will find homophobia, transphobia. Where you find homophobia, transphobia, you will find sexism. Which to me, for my beloved Catholic Church, if my brothers want to get rid of homophobia and transphobia and all the rest of the oppressions, they got to get rid of the sexism to get over it. Women are here. And so churches can also be a source of the homophobia and transphobia. And there were others.

Anyway, so my daughter said, I heard this lecture, Mom, and I talked to one of the lectures, because it was three of them there. And I told them that they should talk to you. And I thought, well, this is strange. Why? And she says, just talk to Mom. And she talked me into going again. And I was interviewed at my office at work. And I told the person, you know, Arnold, I'm straight. I don't know if you can use me. And he said, evidently, your daughter thinks so.

And so I went through it. And it was there that I started seeing more and more folks, parents in particular, that I thought, I don't know what you all are afraid of, but you're suffering when you don't have to suffer. Love your kids. Love them. Because God only knows they love you. You know, and I was seeing so many young people that, oh, I just, I really felt so bad, because sometimes they'd come up to me and, you know, they say things like, I wish you were my mother.

And I thought, it's got to change. People need to really quit succumbing to being handcuffed by this society that wants to tell us how to love our kids, when we already know how to love our kids. Right? And I kept also hearing folks that would be talking to me about, you know, Christian teachings and the Bible and the script, you know, and I'd be there just thinking to myself, no, no, he got it wrong. You know, you're quoting the Old Testament to me.

You're quoting Paul to me, who sometimes had a good day and sometimes had a horrible day. You know, but if you're going to the gospels, the people who supposedly were reporting about Jesus and what Jesus said for real, he never said anything bad about sexual orientation. He said more things bad about people who were hungry for power. That's right. Rich people, you know. So, with that, I thought, okay, I think maybe this is what I'm being called to do. And from there, it just went on.

You know, I got involved with Call to Action, a progressive Roman Catholic group, a national one. Got more and more into immigrants and into the LGBT community. And Lizbeth, God bless her, got to know her at one place. And she introduced me to other things, to other places, other speaking opportunities. And it just grew from there. And with the Human Rights Campaign, and Lizbeth ended up being part of trainers for a la familia, which is a curriculum that goes to the intersections of familia, religion, and the LGBT community, and the interactions of that, to go and speak about that and teach about that.

And the film, I forgot the name of it, but it was a film about different families and groups where these intersections have met.

Rev. Alba Onofrio | 62:25

Wow. Yeah. You have been a pillar in our community for a long time now. And I am so grateful, my goodness, how quickly this hour has passed. But I wonder if you would leave us with, what are some of your sources? Who are your ancestors? Where are your sources of strength and power? Where do you return time and time again, when you need fortification, when you need reminding who you are, who we are as a community? What lineages do you pull from, whether it's blood family or cultural?

Where is that found for you?

Rosa Manriquez | 63:04

Well, for me, straight to the source, God, whatever God may be, which has kind of changed over the years. I mean, as a little, little girl, my grandmother taught me about Titavios. But straight to the source, to the point where I know that God is awesome. And is anything impossible in God? No. But also, God can be a trickster. Amen. A wise guy. Which is fine. Which is okay. How do you make God laugh? Tell God your plans? I understand that.

The gospel this past Sunday was about the people going on the path of Emmaus. And that was right after Jesus had been reported resurrected. And these two people they're just down. They are down because he had been killed and he's gone. And they're saying, hey, but these women say they saw him and Jesus walking with them. And he's saying, what are you talking about? Yeah. I'm thinking, you see? That's what I mean. Wise guy. Wise guy. I go straight to the source.

My grandmother and the women, the ancestral women in my family, are a very strong source for me of trusting in God, of knowing that all things are possible in God. The whole thought of upbringing of life is a journey. And that many times God has not brought us this far to turn us away. Or like these times that we're living in right now. If my grandmother were alive, she would say, God will squeeze you but God will not strangle you. Which is basically, hang in there.

You'll survive. You've got this blood. You've got this DNA in you. You've got this spirit in you. My education through the Immaculate Heart Sisters, which was one of asking why? Question authority. Who gave you the authority to say that? And don't be acting like Jesus was your best friend in high school. Where did your authority come from? Question authority, critical thinking, logical thinking, a passion for education, a passion for history, pay attention, joy, doing things with style. Yes, do things with style.

Hospitality, before all things, hospitality. A lack of hospitality was the sin of Sodom and Gomorrah. It was not homosexuality. It was a lack of hospitality, hospitality always. And there's a lot of people who are just great saints out there, if we'll just look for them. Harvey Milk, what a fantastic person. The parents of, oh, this terrible, Matthew Shepard. Bayard Rustin, right, who's not elevated at all. I mean, all of these people are saints. Michael Lynch, the first recorded casualty of 9-11, a gay Franciscan chaplain.

I mean, they're out there. If we just look for them and we say, yes. Mary said, yes. Right. She had a choice. She didn't have to have Jesus, but she said yes. And in saying yes for us to take a risk, just take a risk. And that's who inspires me. Mary, oh, Mary. Mary's awesome. Mary is awesome. To me, these are all the ones that inspire me. And now I look at my grandchildren, I look at my children, and they inspire me too.

And I'm thinking the world's going to be okay.

Rev. Alba Onofrio | 67:44

Thank you so much for your time today. Thank you for being with us. Thank you for sharing your heart. You had me in tears many, many times throughout this conversation. So I'm just so grateful for you.

Rosa Manriquez | 67:56

Thank you for this time too. And thank you to whoever is listening to this podcast for listening. And if anything, I would say just, you know what? Just remember that when all is said and done, we're loved. That's right.

Rev. Alba Onofrio | 68:11

We are. We're loved. Oh, we are loved. And you are so very loved. Thank you so much. Thank you. Thank you. Well, my loves, that is a wrap for season two of Shameless Theology. And what an incredibly beautiful human to end with. I am so thankful that we were able to hear from Rosa. And I hope that you are as inspired by her life and her love and her commitment to dignity and justice as I am. You know, all season, we have worked to find the right words to amplify people's stories to share our hearts and to lift up these *sinvergüenzas*.

But ultimately, we know that these stories speak for themselves. And what matters is knowing that I'm here, and you're there. And we are all here together. These stories that we're sharing, and these people who are living into this world filled with spiritual violence are critically important. These folks who have figured out ways to raise children in a broken world and have figured out how to resist while keeping their humanity. There are stories here of your neighbors and cousins and abuelas. And I hope you find yourself reflected in these stories too, in their strength and determination and stubbornness as *sinvergüenzas*.

Spiritual violence isn't just happening to someone else or over there. It's happening in all of our lives, in all of our neighborhoods, in all of our churches, and our government buildings. It's not only the saints among us who are called to resist. All of us have to name this violence, reject it, interrupt it, heal it, and work together. This has been an incredible season of Shameless Theology, and we've heard from courageous folks and inspiring folks. I have just enjoyed sharing this with you and learning alongside you.

You know, we have a new book called *Spiritual Violence, Religious Phenomena That Defile the Faith*, and I wanted to remind you that it's available now. If you haven't already, please visit our website and download our free preview. We also want to share these ideas with you and with your communities. The book is meant to be a starting point, a conversation starter, not the final word. This podcast hopefully adds to that by sparking conversation and inspiring action and helping to just bring us into community with each other.

And we would love to hear from you. What has resonated with you? What are your stories of these similar experiences? How can we help you share this work? Are there other things we can do together like workshops or virtual seminars or discussion guides for church groups and book clubs? Find us at soulforce.org and let us know. We'll be back with season three of Shameless Theology before you know it. But in the meantime, sign up for our newsletter to stay in touch with what we're up to here at Soulforce.

Thank you for spending time with us today on this episode of Shameless Theology. I hope you found it both provocative and helpful on your own journey toward healing. These conversations are part of Soulforce's ongoing effort to name harm, honor our lived experiences, and imagine faith beyond violence. If you want to go deeper, you can find a link to our new book called *Spiritual Violence, Religious Phenomena That Defile the Faith* here in the show notes. You can also find more

information on our website at soulforce.org where you can download free theological resources designed to support individuals, faith leaders, and communities who are navigating religious harm and spiritual reconstruction.

If something in today's dialogue resonated with you, maybe it stirred something and settled something or helped you find language for your own story, then you have found yourself in the right place. Consider sharing this episode with someone who might need it and follow along for future conversations and supplemental content. Whoever you are and wherever you find yourself in this time-questioning, grieving, rebuilding, or reclaiming-I am so grateful that you are here. May your theological imagination remain ever alive, and may you find spaces that honor your full, blessed humanity.

With hearts ablaze and spirits unyielding, until next time, I'm Rev. Sex, and this is Shameless Theology.