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St. Francis Parish and NY's Gay Pride Parade

Michael Sean Winters | Jun. 28, 2010 NCR Today

I am a big fan of New York Archbishop Timothy Dolan and was surprised by his decision not to allow parishioners from St. Francis Xavier Church to attend the city?s Gay Pride parade with a banner that extols that church?s ministry to gays and lesbians. After all, the Church explicitly and repeatedly calls for ministry to gays and lesbians and, just a few days prior, Dolan had presided at the Mass of Rededication which included a mention of the parish?s ministry to gays and lesbians.

The video of that Mass clearly shows him nodding in approval as the speaker acknowledges the group and the way they bring LGBT Catholics back to the sacraments. And, St. Francis?s parishioners have been marching with their banner for years. A few years back, Archbishop Niederauer in San Francisco took a similar step regarding a parish?s participation in a gay pride march.
Now, perhaps these moves portend a concentrated effort by the hierarchy to combat the sin of pride. Not so much. Clearly, the political and legal fight over gay marriage has made many bishops feel they need to dig in, become more confrontational, to push back against what they see as an assault on traditional marriage. And, certainly some of the antics at gay pride parades are distinctly unchristian: There is a celebration of lust that would not cause a Brazilian Catholic who attends Carnival to blush, nor a New Orleans Catholic who attends Mardi Gras, but in the experience of Irish-American Catholicism, such celebration of the flesh is more than eye-catching. But, no one has charged the parishioners at St. Francis parish with promoting promiscuity in their banners or the leaflets they hand out at the parade. The leaflets give Mass times at the parish for God?s sake (literally!). One fears that there is some guilt-by-association going on, and that perhaps a few Vatican cardinals watched some videos of a gay pride parade and were scandalized and let the word go forth.

Guilt-by-association, however, is very dangerous. Certainly, there are pro-life groups whose concern for the unborn is admirable but whose zealousness have led them to denounce lifelong pro-life prelates like Cardinal O?Malley for presiding at Sen. Ted Kennedy?s funeral or Archbishop Donald Wuerl for failing to deny communion to pro-choice politicians. Indeed, a pro-life activist in Massachusetts sent around a link to an article [1]in the Christian-inspired website RenewAmerica.com that attacks Elena Kagan for possibly being a lesbian. The author, C. L. Neary, writes: ?Clearly if her sexual orientation is directed towards those of the same gender, it affects her mode of thinking, legal issues included.? I do not know about that? Was not a white man like Chief Justice Earl Warren capable of seeing the injustice of segregation? The bulk of cases to come before the Court in the coming years will have to do with business issues, and in my experience, gays and lesbians tend to have a decidedly libertarian sensibility on such issues, perhaps a carry-over from a libertarian view of sexuality but just as likely derived from the libertarian sensibilities found among Ivy Leaguers because of the parochialism of their philosophic education. More importantly, it is appalling to think that anyone should be questioning Ms. Kagan?s sexuality. Her legal acumen is up for debate not her personal life. The article at the ?Christian? website is despicable.

So, if the good people at St. Francis need to be mindful of antics of their fellow parade marchers, Archbishop Dolan needs to be mindful of the antics of anti-gay groups too. In my experience of the hierarchy, their

opposition to gay rights stems exclusively from their concern for traditional marriage and not from any anti-gay bigotry. Certainly, Archbishop Timothy Dolan does not have a bigoted bone in his body. But, if guilt-by-association is a concern for gays it should be a concern for bishops too and many of those who oppose gay rights are bigots. I would rather march with the gay pride revelers than find myself sharing a stage with the likes of Mr. Neary.

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[1] http://www.renewamerica.com/columns/neary/100614