

Archbishop Burke: Charity, Civility, and Speaking the Truth

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Common ground is found on 'the ground of moral goodness,' and not in a compromise of certain moral truths.



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WASHINGTON, D.C.

(Inside Catholic) -

The funeral of the late Sen. Ted Kennedy provoked a highly charged debate among Catholics about civility. In the midst of this discussion, Archbishop Raymond L. Burke, the prefect of the Supreme Tribunal of the Apostolic Signatura, came to Washington, D.C., to be honored by InsideCatholic.com at its 14th Annual Partnership Dinner at the historic Mayflower Hotel.

Addressing more than 200 guests, Archbishop Burke said, "We must speak the truth in charity," but also, "We should have the courage to look truth in the eye and call things by their common names."

The tension between these two admonitions is evident in his own heroic defense of the Church's teaching on the sanctity of human life and his

personal humility.

Frank Hanna, a Catholic businessman and philanthropist from Atlanta, noted this in his introduction of the honoree. Before ever meeting Archbishop Burke, Hanna said he thought of him as a lion, whose roar "would send chills of admiration" down his spine. But, when he finally met the man one day in Birmingham, he noted:

I was struck by his simple humility. He greeted me with kindness and warmth. And I thought to myself, that's how lions are -- no waving about, just quiet humble strength. There is a reason C. S. Lewis made Aslan, the lion, his hero.

Indeed, it is hard not to be struck by the gentle demeanor of the bishop who caused such a ruckus in the 2004 election by saying he would deny communion to presidential candidate Sen. John Kerry. Since then, he has remained one of the most outspoken American bishops on the subject of the defense of life and marriage.

Friday evening in Washington was no different. Throughout his 50-minute address, the archbishop returned again and again to the scandal of Catholic politicians who support abortion or same-sex marriage. He did not mince his words: "It is not possible to be a practicing Catholic and to conduct oneself in this manner."

"Neither Holy Communion nor funeral rites should be administered to such politicians," said Archbishop Burke. "To deny these is not a judgment of the soul, but a recognition of the scandal and its effects."

With obvious reference to the Kennedy funeral, he argued that when a politician is associated "with greatly sinful acts about fundamental questions like abortion and marriage, his repentance must also be public." He added, "Anyone who grasps the gravity of what he has done will understand the need to make it public."

It's not uncharitable to point out the scandal caused by these Catholic politicians. "The Church's unity is founded on speaking the truth in love. This does not destroy unity but helps to repair a breach in the life of the Church."

Archbishop Burke rejects all the standard arguments made by Catholic politicians and their apologists who support abortion and same-sex marriage. For example, the defense of the unborn and traditional marriage is not strictly a matter of religious faith. "The observance of the natural law is not a confessional practice -- it's inscribed in every human heart."

Archbishop Burke describes the latest tactic of pro-abortion Catholic politicians, who talk about finding common ground as a form of "proportionalist moral reasoning." "Common