

PRIORITIES

Strickland shakes fellow bishops: Stop Father Martin

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This week, the autumn assembly of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops was once again rocked by the intervention of Bishop Joseph Strickland demanding action over the spread of LGBT ideology in the Church. On November 12, members of

the US episcopate (USCCB) were discussing directives for Catholic schools, when Tyler's emeritus Bishop Strickland stood up in the room for an unscheduled intervention.

"Since we're in the area of doctrine," he opened, "a priest and others gathered celebrating the confirmation of a man living openly with a man...it needs to be addressed. Fr James Martin is once again involved."

The incident Strickland referred to was the November 8 Confirmation and reception into the Catholic Church of openly homosexual ABC news anchor Gio Benitez. The man's "husband" served as his Confirmation sponsor. Martin was one of three concelebrating priests, since Benitez credits him with his "conversion." Both Benitez and his "husband" then received Holy Communion during the Mass that followed, in Manhattan's Church of St. Paul the Apostle, known for its pro-LGBT activity.

The Archdiocese of New York's own guidelines for adult reception into the Church outline that candidates must demonstrate they are living in accordance with the Church's teachings. Given the Church's unchanging prohibition of accepting any form of homosexual lifestyle, for Benitez to present himself as still "married" to a man exhibits he did not fulfill the criteria in any way.

"Here we are talking about doctrine," said Strickland on Wednesday. "I just thought I need to raise that issue; I know it's not part of any agenda, but this body gathered – we need to address it."

Martin's LGBT activism is well documented, and thanks to the friendship and patronage he has enjoyed from Pope Francis, such activity has grown unchecked in recent years. Receiving papal support for his annual LGBT conferences meant that Martin's operation then assumed a new level of untouchability. Outrage over Benitez's ceremony was been widespread amongst many Catholics online as footage quickly went viral on Wednesday afternoon. However, the USCCB's official response was not merely muted but non-existent. Strickland was thanked by the presiding speaker and the scheduled conversation moved on.

This point has divided U.S. Catholics. Some – especially previous Strickland critics – have accused him of making a pointless show for notoriety or even clickbait fame, arguing that he must have known it was not the place for his comment. Strickland began by admitting his intervention was out of context of the immediate discussion, but added that it was still relevant since the bishops were discussing doctrine. Context is also key, since he raised the matter in the first opportunity given to him after seeing the footage online that very day.

Such division highlights the tone-deaf response from many, including the USCCB. The one who has been painted as a villain is Strickland, since he made an interruption to the itinerary of the day. Martin however, appears to have escaped without any public censure or reprimand. While the meetings of the USCCB can reveal certain interesting dynamics and ecclesial politics, the day that the US episcopate as a body cares more for the daily agenda than about a grave public sacrilege, is the day on which the USCCB should cease to exist.

Indeed the USCCB has long been uncomfortable with the kind of truths that Strickland has the courage to raise. During the November 2018 meeting of the U.S. bishops, Strickland **challenged** his brother prelates about the lack of action regarding the evil of homosexuality and questioned why Martin was allowed to travel around freely and promote a de facto rejection of the Catholic teaching on homosexuality.

Removed by Francis from his see in November 2023, Strickland has since referenced his 2018 speech as one key incident which ruffled the feathers of the U.S. hierarchy. Indeed, as Strickland noted that year, the problem of homosexuality remains crucial to the crisis which the Church in America has suffered, especially in wake of the McCarrick scandal. The Church's teaching has not changed, but few bishops are prepared to unashamedly proclaim it in the public sphere.

When coupled with the papal support enjoyed by individuals such as Fr. Martin, this has meant that the Church has effectively appeared to have changed Her stance on LGBT topics. At the same time this doctrinal emphasis has been sacrificed in favor of social polemics, such as immigration.

Bishops making passionate pleas for border officials to respect the dignity of man, seem to have forgotten the wider spiritual reality of that statement. In 1978 the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith's **document**, *Persona Humana*, noted with

respect to the wider question of homosexuality that “there can be no true promotion of man’s dignity unless the essential order of his nature is respected.”

The CDF's 1986 doctrinal document “[On the pastoral care of homosexual persons](#)” stated that a “truly pastoral approach will appreciate the need for homosexual persons to avoid the near occasions of sin.” It added how bishops were to ensure that they, and any “pastoral programme” in the diocese, were “clearly stating that homosexual activity is immoral.”

Strickland’s intervention on Wednesday may have been out of sync with the schedule, but it was fully in line with what the spiritual priorities of the U.S. episcopate should be.