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An empty communion line?

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NCR Today

With just over a month to go before the presidential election, several U.S. bishops in recent days have been rather outspoken in suggesting to Catholics how they vote.

Atop the list of central issues this year for several prelates seems to be same-sex marriage.

In a pastoral letter that garnered wide-media coverage last week, Archbishop John Myers of Newark, N.J., warned Catholics that disagreement with the church's official teaching on same-sex marriage "seriously harm[s] their communion with Christ and His Church."

"I urge those not in communion with the Church regarding her teaching on marriage and family to sincerely to re-examine their consciences," Myers wrote in a 16-page pastoral statement Sept. 25. "If they continue to be unable to assent to or live the Church's teaching in these matters, they must in all honesty and humility refrain from receiving Holy Communion until they can do so with integrity."

Over at the Mirror of Justice blog, which is dedicated to Catholic legal theory, Cornell University Law School professor Steve Shiffrin asks this morning if that statement is yet another example of the emperor losing his clothes.

"If Myers is right about this, it seems to me that the overwhelming majority of American Catholics should not be receiving Communion. To reject the Church's teaching on contraception is to reject the teaching authority of the Church, and the overwhelming majority of American Catholics do exactly that."

"There is already a crisis in the teaching authority of the Bishops," continues Shiffrin. "If they follow the lead of Archbishop Myers in being specific about which moral teachings cannot be rejected while continuing to receive communion, Catholics will either leave the Church or contumaciously receive

Communion anyway. In other words, the Emperor will lose many of the clothes that are left."

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