Opinion
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Pope Leo XIV welcomes Jesuit Fr. James Martin, an author and editor at large at America mag

Pope Leo XIV welcomes Jesuit Fr. James Martin, an author and editor at large at America magazine, to the library of the Apostolic Palace at the Vatican Sept. 1, 2025. (CNS/Vatican Media)



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November 14, 2025

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(NCR graphic/Angie Von Slaughter)

You would think that the reception of someone into full communion with the Catholic Church would be something we could all agree is an occasion of immense joy.

Evidently not when that person is gay.

"Good Morning America" co-anchor Gio Benitez was confirmed into the Catholic Church earlier this month, with his husband serving as his sponsor.

Benitez posted a video that included highlights of the Mass on his Instagram account , with a lengthy post documenting his emotional journey.

Benitez credited Pope Francis' "legacy of inclusivity" for his reversion, sharing that it was Jesuit Fr. James Martin's appearance on "Good Morning America" after the pope's death that lit the spark of faith.

"Martin was on GMA speaking about Pope Francis' legacy of inclusivity," Benitez said in the Nov. 10 post. "His words struck me. It was the first time I had seen a Catholic priest speaking in such a beautiful way about LGBTQ people."

View this post on Instagram

A post shared by Gio Benitez (@giobenitez)

Benitez's reflection is a moving testimony of a man who has found a home in the Catholic Church — the tone is excitable, joyous and infectious as he references the spiritual mentors and family members who contributed to his full initiation into the church. Martin was present at the confirmation as one of those mentors.

Reaction poured in from all corners of the Internet, the majority of which was positive and celebratory.

Until the conservative community on Catholic X (Twitter) got wind of the confirmation.

"The brazenness of this scandal doesn't happen without *Amoris Laetitia*," said one Catholic account, referring to Francis' apostolic exhortation addressing the pastoral needs of families.

"This is all Francis, from *Amoris* to *Fiducia* [*Supplicans*]. It's unacceptable, and it must end. The buck stops with Leo XIV, it's his responsibility now," wrote Rorate Caeli, the traditionalist Catholic blog, citing the Vatican's document allowing clergy to bless people in same-sex relationships.

"This is vulgar. What was that about a little leaven? The Pope needs to speak Ex

Cathedra and settle this matter once and for all. If the Pope says it's okay, I am on the way out," said another Catholic X user with nearly 6,500 followers.

Perhaps the most scandalous attack came from Dominican Fr. Peter Totleben, who took to X to unleash a lengthy, ad hominem attack on Martin — accusing Martin of participating in Benitez's confirmation as symptomatic of an alleged elitism.

"People are so exercised about Martin's problematic advocacy for LGBT issues specifically, that they have mostly failed to notice that this is only one part of the larger problem with his ministry: his ministry is to be the chaplain for the Beautiful People," Totleben said.

Though his follower count sits at a modest 10,000, Totleben's rant went viral. At the time of publication, his post had over 127,000 views on X, prompting reactions from New York Times columnist Ross Douthat, America magazine's Senior Editor Kevin Clarke, Know Your Enemy podcast host Matthew Sitman, and even Democratic political operative Christopher Hale, amongst others.

"The really interesting thing about this confirmation episode then, isn't even that it is an LGBT thing," Totleben said in his post. "The really interesting thing is that it is a high society event. Martin is the chaplain to the Beautiful People, and Gio Benitez is one of the Beautiful People, so of course the socialite priest Martin is going to be there."

A quick scroll of Totleben's X feed will show you that he tweets multiple times a day about a myriad of issues, and spends an inordinate amount of time quarreling with others in the comments. Totleben is still replying to his detractors more than two days after his initial post, repeatedly engaging in back and forth, bad faith discourse with those who have come to Martin's defense.

Totleben's online habits aside, his lengthy post isn't just mean-spirited and uncharitable. It's inaccurate, and frankly, a little weird.

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A brief scan of Martin's social media will show that the Jesuit priest presided at a baptism for a non-celebrity couple that day. Martin also celebrated the 11 a.m. and 7:30 p.m. Masses at St. Ignatius Loyola Parish in New York, and met with a young adult club at the end of the 11 a.m. Mass on Sunday.

As a Jesuit, Martin has held numerous posts that have involved working in a hospice with the Missionaries of Charity, a homeless shelter in Boston, an orphanage in Jamaica, and in community outreach projects in Chicago. He even wrote a book about his two years in East Africa with Jesuit Refugee Services.

A brief Google or social media search could have confirmed all this, but instead, Totleben opted for a lengthy ad hominem post that does nothing but foment divisiveness in the church. His comments are also a source of scandal. Imagine a non-Catholic inspired by Benitez's story who wants to know more about the Catholic faith. Imagine they see a post like Totleben's, or the many comments on Martin's Facebook page calling him a heretic. What do these social media posts say about how seriously Catholics take their faith?

Martin and his LGBTQ ministry has been repeatedly validated by Pope Francis and Pope Leo XIV. He's a bestselling author and sought after Catholic speaker. He is a consultor to the Vatican's Dicastery of Communication and was a member of the Synod of Bishops in 2023.

At every step of the way Martin seems unflappable, persisting in his ministry despite relentless attacks and trolling.

"Blessed are you when they insult you and persecute you and utter every kind of evil against you [falsely] because of me. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward will be great in heaven. Thus they persecuted the prophets who were before you," says Jesus in the Beatitudes.

Perhaps that's why online conservatives are still so obsessed with Martin.

This story appears in the **Digital Dunces** feature series. View the full series.