Opinion
NCR Voices



Fans line up in the rain outside the Ed Sullivan Theater in New York on May 21, 2026, ahead of the final episode of "The Late Show with Stephen Colbert." (AP/Ted Shaffrey)



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May 22, 2026

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Stephen Colbert, I shudder to think what we will do without you.

As host of CBS' "The Late Show" these past 11 years, you made us laugh, a lot, at ourselves and what was happening in the world around us (even when things have been pretty grim).

But over the years, you have also made us think about all sorts of things, including, but not in any kind of preaching way, how faith can fit into people's lives because it seemed to seamlessly connect in yours.

I don't think it's a spoiler alert for me to point out to our readers that you're Catholic. I mean, you've quoted the Nicene Creed, your favorite psalms and verses from "The Hound of Heaven" and have had Catholic throwdowns with guests including Jack White and Patricia Heaton.

You also, right to the last episode May 21, have poked some fun at the church you clearly love — joking how news of a fake priest calendar wasn't the worst scandal for the church and the gag that Pope Leo XIV was about to come out of the show's dressing room as the next guest but left in disgust because he hadn't been given Chicago-style hot dogs.

> 'If there's some relationship between my faith and my comedy, it's that no matter what happens, you are never defeated.'
> —Stephen Colbert
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But really, as far as faith goes, you had me from your "The King of Glory" dance at the end of a segment of "Strangers with Candy" which aired 1999-2000 — predating YouTube. When that clip first made the rounds years later I couldn't get enough of it, as someone who grew up with that 1970s iconic Catholic folk song.

Your ability to find humor not just in the church but in the news of the day is definitely your secret sauce but your other gift — which would certainly be appreciated if you dropped in at a parish gathering or two say a few times a year —

is your ability to convey how we need one another; we need community.

That was particularly poignant in its absence in your shows during COVID-19. It was palpable all week in final episodes and was on full stage, literally, when the entire "Late Night" crew joined you in the show's final minutes.

But there's also something else. Beyond the laughs, applause lines and audience adoration, is something below the surface that's not inherently funny but goes hand in hand with faith. It's your recognition of the value of suffering and an appreciation of the lessons from grief and although these are not funny topics, for sure, they have no doubt propelled your humor.

I'm not making this leap myself. I've heard you talk about some of your own challenges, particularly in a 2019 episode on CNN's Anderson Cooper 360°. In that show, about grief, which 10 million viewers watched by the next day, you said you had learned to love the thing that you "wished most had not happened," recounting the deaths of your dad and two brothers in a plane crash when you were 10 years old.

Your words could easily have been a talk for a parish grief support group with their emphasis on how you came out of that hardship grateful for your life and realizing that suffering is inevitable; it's part of humanity and connects us all.

At my parish, we have already heard some of your words on grief that I "borrowed" from your 2013 on air tribute to your mom after her death. "I know it may sound greedy," you said, "to want more days with a person who lived so long, but the fact that my mother was 92 does not diminish — it only magnifies — the enormity of the room whose door has now quietly shut."

I felt the same way about my dad who died a few months later at the age of 94 and expressed the similar thought in the eulogy I wrote for him — that his age when he died did not in any way not lessen our sadness. I hope that's OK.

Pope Francis engages in a light-hearted moment with comedians Stephen Colbert, Chris Rock

Pope Francis engages in a light-hearted moment with comedians Stephen Colbert, Chris Rock, Jimmy Fallon and other comedians after an audience at the Vatican June 14, 2024. (CNS/Vatican Media)

I'm thinking if you visited some parishes around the country, now that you have some free time, you could give a talk, maybe during a parish pancake supper or before a bingo night, on how we need to laugh amid challenges and how that is by no means glossing over personal or broader struggles but is a step of faith.

Even Pope Francis spoke of this in 2024 when he addressed you and about 100 other comedians from around the world at the Vatican, emphasizing the unique role of laughter in bringing people together in the face of conflict.

You've certainly made the belief and humor connection before and maybe said it best in a 2022 episode when singer Dua Lipa asked if your faith and comedy ever overlap and if one ever wins out.

As you put it: "I think ultimately, us all being mortal, the faith will win out in the end. But I certainly hope when I get to heaven Jesus has a sense of humor."

But then you moved right on to the notion that "sadness is like a little bit of an emotional death, but not a defeat if you can find a way to laugh about it" — a notion which I'm guessing has carried you through these last several months as your canceled show was winding down.

But as you said four years ago: "If there's some relationship between my faith and my comedy, it's that no matter what happens, you are never defeated. You must understand and see this in the light of eternity and find some way to love and laugh with each other."

We will do that, Stephen, but please think about continuing with us in this endeavor. We could sing "The King of Glory," or have Catholic throwdowns or "Lord of the Rings" watch parties and raise money for charity.

We miss you already!

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