

The Kennedys Take America to Mass

Michael Sean Winters | Aug. 27, 2009 NCR Today

Most of the commentary on Senator Kennedy's Catholicism has focused on the issues he espoused. Most note approvingly his many positions that advocated long held aspects of Catholic social teaching such as his efforts to alleviate poverty, his support for universal health care and his defense of workers' rights. A minority, and a nasty minority at that, focuses on his pro-abortion rights position.

What is remarkable watching the coverage today, however, is how often the word "Mass" is mentioned. The Church does not have much of a presence in the mainstream media. Pope Benedict XVI's encyclical got some attention for about forty-eight hours. There is local coverage of events like the installation of a new bishop. But, when was the last time you heard Andrea Mitchell and Wolf Blitzer talk about a Mass?

One of the ways the Kennedys are Catholics is that when they get together, they have a Mass. For weddings, for funerals, for baptisms, they have a Mass. So, this morning, before the Senator's body was taken from the family home in Hyannisport, the family had a Mass. Tomorrow, there will be a funeral Mass. It is what we Catholics do.

For many Americans, the first time they had seen a Catholic Mass was the funeral of President Kennedy at St. Matthew's Cathedral in 1963. And what a Mass! Cardinal Cushing's heavily accented Latin was unintelligible. It was a low Mass and of course, the Cardinal faced away from the people back then. Tomorrow's Mass will be very different in its outward manifestations, but it will still be the Mass. One of the things the Kennedy clan shows the culture time and again is the centrality of the Mass to the lives of Catholics. That is yet another gift from the late, great Senator.

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