

Cardinal-designate Dolan leads cardinals' reflection on evangelization

Cindy Wooden Catholic News Service | Feb. 17, 2012

VATICAN CITY -- Secularism has had an easy time spreading through many traditionally Christian cultures because so many Christians do not know their faith and do not grasp the truth it teaches, Cardinal-designate Timothy M. Dolan of New York told the College of Cardinals.

While the New York prelate did not downplay the challenges the church faces in reviving the faith of its members and bringing the Gospel to those who have never heard it, he delivered his assessment Feb. 17 with his characteristic smile and broad gestures, telling Pope Benedict XVI and the cardinals that evangelization requires joy and love.

The head of the Archdiocese of New York was asked to give the main address on evangelization and missionary activity at a meeting of the pope with the cardinals and cardinals-designate, who were to be inducted into the College of Cardinals Feb. 18.

The meeting was attended by 133 prelates, including at least 20 of the 22 who were to receive their red hats from the pope the following morning.

The churchmen entered the Vatican synod hall, greeting old friends and introducing themselves to the new members. While an announcer repeatedly told them there were no assigned seats and they could sit anywhere, the men about to become cardinals all sat together on the far side of the hall, except for Cardinal-designate Dolan, who was seated next to the pope.

During the morning session, Pope Benedict did not address the assembly and was not one of the seven participants who commented on the presentation by Cardinal-designate Dolan and a brief statement by Archbishop Rino Fisichella, president of the Pontifical Council for the New Evangelization, on plans for the 2012-2013 Year of Faith.

The discussion was scheduled to continue during an evening session and the meeting was to close with the recitation of evening prayer.

In his presentation, Cardinal-designate Dolan said that when Cardinal Angelo Sodano, dean of the College of Cardinals, asked him to be the main presenter, he hinted that he did so because New York "might be the 'capital of secular culture.'"

"New York -- without denying its dramatic evidence of graphic secularism -- is also a very religious city," he said, where even those "who boast of their secularism" exhibit an openness to the divine and have questions about God.

While secularism "is invading every aspect of daily life," the New York prelate said, it also is true that most people, on some level, still question the ultimate meaning of life and still ponder the idea of God.

"Even a person who brags about being secular and is dismissive of religion has within an undeniable spark of interest in the beyond, and recognizes that humanity and creation is a dismal riddle without the concept of some kind of creator," he said.

The cardinal-designate said those people don't want to be considered objects of missionary activity, but Christians have an obligation to help them maintain their search for meaning in life.

Humility, joy and love are key to the success of the evangelization efforts of the church and its members, he said.

"Triumphalism in the church was dead" after the Second Vatican Council, he said, but "so was confidence."

Catholics recognize that they and their church need conversion, too, he said. And, they must be convinced that what they are sharing with others is not a doctrine, but the person of Jesus.

At the same time, because Jesus is the truth, Catholics must make a commitment "to combat catechetical illiteracy," he said.

"True enough, the new evangelization is urgent because secularism has often choked the seed of faith, but that choking was sadly made easy because so many believers really had no adequate knowledge or grasp of the wisdom, beauty and coherence of the truth," he said.

The cardinal-designate told the College of Cardinals that when he was a seminarian, he was told to smile because a missionary or evangelist had to be a person of joy.

"When I become the archbishop of New York, a priest told me, 'You better stop smiling when you walk the streets of Manhattan or you'll be arrested,'" he said, but he still believes Christians must show the world that faith is saying yes "to everything decent, good, true, beautiful and noble."

Cardinal-designate Dolan said that on the eve of receiving his red hat from the pope, he also had to speak of the fact that Christians are called to love and serve the church and their neighbors, even to the point of shedding their blood if necessary.

The cardinals, he said, "are but 'scarlet audiovisual aids' for all our brothers and sisters," who also are called "to be ready to suffer and die for Jesus."

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