

This Could Be the Start of Something Big

Ken Briggs | Aug. 29, 2012 NCR Today

Now that Cardinal Timothy Dolan has become the designated benedictionary at both Republican and Democratic conventions, the speculation about his future has become rampant at my local coffee shop.

The ready-to-be-interviewed regulars, who skip a morning for hip replacement consultation at peril of missing an invading Channel 9 election year news crew, marvels at the cardinal's prowess.

Jerry, who fashions himself a Catholic Tacitus, points out the cardinal's string of victories, first by replacing the archbishop in line to become president of the bishops' conference, then sidelining the local bishops who would normally have been assigned the role of making a purse out of a sow's ear convention appearance.

The others take his word for it that Donlan has the makings of bigger things for himself. This leads to the unspeakable: sizing up the cardinal as papal material. Everyone knows you're not supposed to consider the papacy as something as crass as politics, but this is a largely Catholic bunch of egg white omelet eaters who've been around the church track a few times and claim to spot politics where it shows up -- in the clergy, for instance.

It's obvious to Frank that Dolan has created an opening for himself to test his viability as a Seat of St. Peter's candidate -- continue his pilgrimage of party piety around the globe. An ideal springboard for one whose honed his sills. Don argues that this would take too much time from his duties in New York, but Frank believes that Dolan's "dream" justifies it. Such a tour, he thinks, could tout the cardinal's credentials as a non-partisan cleric who could negotiate among factions both in the world and the church.

Just dipping his toes into foreign waters would generate gobs of publicity -- and his polished style of beseeching the Almighty in such compromised conditions could parley his Irish charm to popularity of international proportions, making him a prohibitive favorite at the next conclave.

The coffee shop's owner and operator, Anthony, has a World Almanac tucked under the counter for moments like this. Soon we're scouring the world for potential convention stops.

The cardinal would need to be both nimble and flexible, qualities sought in any candidate, Dave notes. Right away there'd be a premium on getting along and appearing tolerant while slipping uncompromised truth into final prayers.

Norway would entail entreaties with the Red-Green Coalition, the Labour Party, the Socialist Left and the Center party. Like other places, Norway requires from the cardinal the warm heart and the hard nose.

Matt thinks he'd need a solid manager to avoid confusion. The Brazilians, for example, sport a head-spinning variety of rivals: Socialist, Socialist Christian and Christian Labour parties.

Indonesians list an even greater challenge, says Matt. It would require attention to the Golongan Karya, the

Prosperous Justice Party, the United Development Party and and National Awakening Party.

The Ukraine offers something more familiar to Westerners like Dolan and a golden opportunity to display magnanimity: the Party of Religion competes with the Lytvyn Bloc and the Communists.

We could already see the 50 minute documentary on PBS and the spectacular picture gallery.

The cardinal's political party calendar appears to be open as we conjure this scenario. We hope he goes for it. Ninety parties in 90 days or something like that.

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