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Marie Griffith on Red Mass

by Michael Sean Winters

Distinctly Catholic

Over at Religion & Politics, Marie Griffith thinks there is something unseemly about the annual Red Mass. She worries that the justices of the Supreme Court are "expected" to attend a religious service, although she also notes that Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg does not attend and has given her reasons for not attending. Griffith also mistakenly states that this year's Mass was the first at which Justice Elena Kagan was present - Ms. Kagan was there last year too.

I will be writing about the Red Mass in my column for the print edition of NCR this month. But, for the moment, I will simply say that no one is "expected" or coerced into attending the annual event. It is curious to me that Justice Breyer, who is not a Catholic, is one of the most regular attendees. I have no idea why Breyer or the other justices come. Perhaps it is for the exquisite music. Perhaps, because, mindful of the many burdens that they face, they will take prayers wherever they can get them. Sometimes the sermons sound like political screeds, although this year's was certainly not. And, Archbishop Broglio owes no one an apology for calling for evangelization at a Catholic Mass no matter who is in attendance! The conflation of symbols at the Mass is interesting but it is hardly obnoxious. Infringements of religious liberty, still less any suggestion of improper religious intervention, are made of sterner stuff than the Red Mass.

Full disclosure: I am on the advisory board at Religion & Politics, and a communicant at St. Matthew's Cathedral where the Red Mass is held.

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