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Dolan: Pope's remark on gays does not change church teaching

by Catholic News Service

New York — New York Cardinal Timothy Dolan, a guest Tuesday on "CBS This Morning" to discuss the pope's impromptu news conference on a papal flight the previous day, stressed that Pope Francis "would be the first to say, 'My job isn't to change church teaching; my job is to present it as clearly as possible.' "

Dolan, president of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, was asked to comment in particular on the pope's remark: "If a person is gay, seeks God and has good will, who am I to judge? They should not be marginalized. They are our brothers."

That remark, Dolan said, reflects "a gentle, merciful, understanding, compassionate" approach to church teaching which emphasizes "that while certain acts may be wrong, we would always love and respect the person and treat the person with dignity."

He said the pope's words "may be something people find new and refreshing. I for one don't think it is, and I hate to see previous popes caricatured as not having that," he said in the interview.

In the 80-minute news conference on the plane from Rio de Janeiro to Rome returning from World Youth Day, the pope also answered questions about women in the church, divorce and his own spirituality.

Answering a question about reports of a gay lobby at the Vatican, the pope emphasized that it was important to "distinguish between a person who is gay and someone who makes a gay lobby," he said. "A gay lobby isn't good."

Pope Francis said the Catechism of the Catholic Church explains church teaching about homosexuality

very well, saying, "one must not marginalize these persons, they must be integrated into society. The problem isn't this (homosexual) orientation -- we must be like brothers and sisters."

The catechism states people with homosexual tendencies "must be accepted with respect and compassion, and sensitivity. Every sign of unjust discrimination in their regard should be avoided."

The church teaches that all sexual activity outside of the legitimate marriage of one man and one woman is sinful.

When asked if he was surprised by the pope's comments, Dolan said he was not. "What surprises me is that people are surprised," he said.

The cardinal stressed that church teaching on homosexuality has not changed.

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"While we are rather cogent in our teaching we're equally compelling in the mercy, the graciousness, the respect with which we say it," he added.

Chicago Cardinal Francis George said in a statement Monday that the pope "reaffirmed the teaching of the Catholic faith and other religions that homosexual genital relations are morally wrong. The pope also reaffirmed the church's teaching that every man and woman should be accepted with love, including those with same-sex orientation."

The cardinal noted that the archdiocese of Chicago sponsors ministries for homosexuals that "make available the sacraments of the church for those who want to live chastely as followers of Christ in the church. Judgments about individual guilt are settled in the sacrament of reconciliation, according to Catholic pastoral practice," he added.

In a blog post Monday, Basilian Fr. Thomas Rosica, CEO of Salt and Light, noted that the pope's visit to Brazil "left a deep and lasting impression" on the world.

He also noted that the pope's comments on the plane, "particularly about the divorced and remarried, women and homosexuals must be read and understood through the lenses of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the outreach and concern of the church for those on the fringes, and the mercy, tenderness and forgiveness of a pastor who walks among his people."

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