



Theodore Edgar McCarrick (b. July 7, 1930) is the former archbishop of Washington, D.C. The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) elected McCarrick to head committees on migration, aid to the Church in central and eastern Europe, and international and domestic policy.

I'm an only child with a large family. My father was one of thirteen in a Catholic family from Virginia. My mother was one of eight in a poor family from Ireland. My father died when I was three, and my mother had to go to work in a factory in the Bronx making car parts.

My mother was brought up in the faith and at the end of her life she became a daily communicant.

I went to Incarnation School, which had at one time between fifteen hundred and sixteen hundred students. We were split between morning sessions and afternoon sessions. In my class, when I was six years old, we sat three on a bench. There were seventy of us, with one nun teaching. She had to keep us together, try to keep us quiet, and teach us! It was a great experience and we learned a lot.

I went to Catholic school throughout. I graduated from Incarnation School in 1944 and then went to Xavier High School in New York, but I didn't take it as seriously as I should have and was expelled. I was really disappointed with myself and with disappointing my mother and my family. I'm grateful she was able to get me into Fordham Prep, where I finished high school.

When we were really young, 75 percent of the boys in Catholic school wanted to be priests. As we got older, the percentage got smaller and smaller, and by the eighth grade maybe only five or six of us did. I was one of them. I was an altar boy and grew up in a very Catholic neighborhood. I didn't really know people who weren't Catholic, other than some Jewish friends.

You always have hesitations about making such a commitment; it would be unusual for anyone not to reflect on a vocational decision he or she has made. I was twenty when I made my decision. I was on retreat in Switzerland at a Carthusian monastery in the mountains. It was there that I looked at my life and felt that God might be calling me to be a priest. In the seminary you go through times when you wonder if you made the right decision, but as I look back I could never imagine having done anything else.

My mother would've loved to have grandchildren, but she was good about my decision. She would ask, "You're going to be a priest around here, right? You're not going to be a missionary?" So I told her that I really wanted to be a parish priest.

If you don't have faith, then Mass becomes just a symbol. We believe it's a reenactment of the mystery of God's love, of Calvary, and of the Resurrection. What a tremendous gift when you think about it.

When I was archbishop, I would try to celebrate daily Mass in different parishes as often as possible. When talking with people, I would wonder if they knew why they were going to Mass. To a certain extent this is the reason for our preaching. Preaching has to break open the Scriptures; people have to learn what the Lord is saying, what he means, and how it fits into this life. Our preaching also has to give people a reason for the faith, share with them Jesus' words, why we believe this, and that we have to open ourselves to believe.

I offer Mass every day. If you don't have Mass in the morning, you feel like the day hasn't really started. The greatest gift we've ever received from the Lord is Jesus. He sent His son to be like us in all things except sin. The Father wants us to know He understands our lives and sent His son to be one of us. Your whole life should be moved by prayer.

I remember St. Vincent de Paul saying that it is always an insult to the poor to give them anything, but if you do, do it with love and they will forgive you. It is a great line, so when you give you give with love. Catholic social justice teaching is based so much around human dignity and was very much the key to the teaching of Pope John Paul II. To believe that God is love and that He cares for us is to recognize the dignity of the human person; I have never forgotten that. That has been a motivation in my life.

It was so good to hear the Holy Father say that you cannot be fully Catholic if you are just faithful to the liturgy and faithful to the doctrine. The doctrine, the liturgy, and praying together demand that you work on the inequalities and the disappointments of our times, that all people have a right to live and, beyond that, a right to a decent life.

I don't believe you can be authentically Catholic without being committed to the social doctrine of the Church. When I was in grammar school, we had these little boxes to help the poor. That was good, but that is half of it. The other half is to find out why there are so many poor people and how we can do something to help them. I've tried to be involved in third-world issues to make sure that today's globalization is with a conscience.

You can't be an authentic Catholic unless you're committed to the right to life. And this right is more than just being born. It involves the right to grow, to be educated, to have a family, to exercise your dignity, to work for a living, and to make a contribution to society. You can't forget about people once they are born.

If I were elected pope, I would resign right away and get a good guy in there. We've had great popes and Pope Benedict XVI is no exception. He's so anxious to serve the Lord, to follow his predecessor whom he loved so much. The secret of Pope Benedict XVI is that he's truly a very humble man. He doesn't want to be John Paul II. He wants to be Pope Benedict and to do what God is telling him to do. The humility and holiness of this Holy Father is overwhelming. He's brilliant and he's so clear. He's trying to get us all back to our roots.

I would do the same thing but not as effectively, because I'm not as smart or as holy. What the Church needs today is faith. This Holy Father is very concerned about Europe, as all of us are, because it seems to be drifting away. Europe needs that new evangelism. We have to rebuild it.

Once we get back to our roots in faith, from there we build charity. Charity is about the poor, about the social doctrine of the Church. Charity without faith isn't going to happen; without faith it's just philanthropy.

If I make it, heaven for me is that I'm going to be with the Lord and at peace. That's where we all need to be as we go through all the challenges and concerns of our life. We worry about ourselves, our families, our friends, peace in the world, people who are poor, and the future. In heaven we'll be able to say, "Lord, thank you for letting me in, for taking all these worries from me, and allowing me to be in peace. There'll be no more pain, no more tears."

There is a hell. I hope there aren't too many people going there. I hope that the God who loves us will find a moment for each one of us to say "I did wrong" and "I'm sorry." There are evil spirits in the world, but we have hope that there'll always be—for everybody, even the worst of us—a moment when the Lord will say, "Tell me, do you really not love me?" And the answer will be, "I love you, and I am sorry."

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