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True Church: People in pews, not celibate men

Most days, I tell myself this band of blind men will not drive me from the church of my birth, the faith of my family and a source of strength, comfort, joy and, some days, even transformation.

Why let the terrorists win?

Most days, I manage to dismiss the latest entraining fulmination out of Rome or Lake Street with that well-worn line from The Big Man himself, "Forgive them, for they know not what they do."

But some days — and this is one of them — it's particularly hard explaining to my children why mother keeps dragging them to a church which, fresh from turning a blind eye to child abuse, now decides gay adoption is "gravely immoral" and does "violence to children." It's



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2006, not 1906.

Celibate men isolated from the world may not know, up close and personal, any healthy, happy, gay households. But lots of today's children do, and they, and the rest of us, see this latest pronouncement for what it is: bigotry born of ignorance.

This archdiocesan emperor has no clothes, by the way. Everybody knows who allowed the "gravely immoral violence" to the children, year after year, again and again.

As for the argument that bishops have to follow the Vatican's rule, it's ridiculous. Bishops, like everybody else, have free choice. But doing the right thing takes courage and comes with consequences. Ask Bob Bowers, who stood up to Cardinal Law and lost his parish. Or Walter Cuenin, who stood up to Cardinal Law and lost his parish. Or Ron Coyne. Etc., etc.

Yet here I am, a faith-filled Catholic throughout this mess, constantly asked to defend myself.

Here's what I say. That I stay because my faith, like my country, is bred in my bones. George Bush has made a million mistakes; I'd never become a Canadian. I stay because the Catholic hi-

erarchy and Catholic purists want people like me — we not-buying-the-total-program so-called cafeteria Catholics — to go. They'd prefer it, I'm convinced, no matter how much money we've got.

Join the near-beer Episcopalian with their gay bishop just out of rehab, they say. Become a Jew for Jesus, they say. An anything-goes Unitarian. Whatever. Just leave. Take off. Get out.

Make me, I reply. I stay for the heroes of these scandalous days. The late Father Robert Bullock, who first said that Cardinal Law had to go; the parishioners of St. Albert the Great, who refused to leave their church and let the archdiocese shut it down; the par-

ents of Our Lady of Presentation, who erected a tent city in Brighton when Sean O'Malley shut them down a day before graduation; the board members of Catholic Charities, who resigned rather than treat gay couples as less than human.

I stay because things do change, even in this ancient church. Well into the 20th century, Catholic Charities worked to keep Catholic orphans from adoption by ... Protestants. History knows how crazy that was.

History will look back on Catholic Charities now and see that it was brave enough to take money from Voice of the Faithful and to honor Mayor Tom Menino, both against the wishes of the archdiocese.

But it was not brave enough this week, and history will judge that, too. All through the long history of this church, popes and bishops have disgraced themselves. They have been rigid and petty and closed and cruel. Yet Catholics in the pews have remained filled with grace, embrace and consoling love. So many still are.

I stay because the Catholics in the pews, not the bishops in the chanceries, are the true church.

And I will not let them take it away.

Margery Eagan's radio show airs at noon weekdays and 9 a.m. Saturdays on 96.9 FM-Talk.