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2015

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Student perspectives on worship services from Instructor Jennifer Garvin-Sanchez's Religious Studies 108 Human Spirituality undergraduate course at Virginia Commonwealth University.

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Church of the Epiphany: “Catholicism”

by Rachel Firkins

On Wednesday, September 23rd at 9:30 A.M., I attended the Church of Epiphany. This church is located in North Chesterfield, VA at the address of 11000 Smoketree Drive. The pastor at the mass I attended was Reverend John Kazibwe.

Driving up to the church, there was a bell tower outside, but the building itself looked pretty plain. The outside shape is pretty boxy and the building is a nude/brown color. Walking into the church, the decorations are not over done, but there are crosses and crucifixes hung up throughout the church. Where the service is actually held, there are rows of pews that people file in and out of before and after the service. Also, when walking into the main auditorium there is a sink of holy water where people dipped their fingers and made crosses on their forehead with the water on their hands. Where the priest stands, there is a big wreath that was decorated in pretty muted “fall” colors as well.

When entering the church, each guest is welcomed by a church member who is handing out pamphlets that take you through the songs and prayers of the service. There were no questions asked about what religion or background anyone came from, so it felt very welcoming to sit through the service. I did not ask anyone to explain the service to me, but went with a friend who practiced Catholicism so she gave me a good understanding of what was going on throughout mass.

I noticed many families with young children and older people attending the service, but there was a good demographic of all ages. Also, the church was filled with predominantly white people in the pews. But, the priest himself is a black man from Africa, so I got the impression that the congregation was very welcoming of all races and ethnicities.

I never really attended church growing up, so this may be common, but the Catholic mass has a break close to the middle of the service where everyone says “peace be with you” to the neighbors surrounding them in the pews. This made me feel uncomfortable at first, but thinking back on it, the gesture of saying, “and peace be with you” to a complete stranger is very loving and kind. This gesture made me feel as if the Catholic Church is a very comfortable and loved home by many affiliates.

The service itself was very interesting to observe. In the Catholic Church, the mass begins by the Priest walking in carrying a cross, which he then sets down when he reaches the platform he speaks on. Also, when the Priest walks in, the entire congregation rises to their feet as if they are welcoming him into the church. I found this to be very formal in my opinion.

The service then opened with a song that the entire congregation sang along to and then someone from the congregation rose

from their seat after the song to give the first reading of the mass. The catholic service I attended had many breaks in between verses and standing and sitting where the entire congregation sang songs along together. This was very warming to the heart, but I did not particularly feel comfortable singing along with the rest of the affiliates in mass.

After two readings and some more songs, the Priest rose and spoke for a good twenty minutes. His entire speech was about love in our lives and how it can appear in multiple forms. Also, he discussed how love was different for every person. He related his experiences because he chose the love of god over “falling” in love with another person. But, no matter the route of love we decided to choose, God was there in the love that we found.

I found his speech very relaxing and other people in the congregation laughed along with the Priest at certain parts of his speech. After his sermon, there were some more songs and then communion was given. During their communion, everyone rises from their pews when told so and walks up to one person who gives them a piece of bread and then walks to another person who gives them a glass of red wine. After they have received communion, everyone comes to sit back down and prays for about five minutes. There is still music going on in the background, but I found this to be the most peaceful part of mass because everyone was lost inside their own thoughts and praying for their own life.

Mass ended with a very uplifting song in which everyone sang along cheerfully and people began to exit after the priest. All in all, the catholic service was considerably formal, but I also found it to be relaxed when certain

people were speaking to the congregation. There were parts in the service where everyone in the church seemed to quietly chuckle and then go back to observing.

I had a very good experience attending mass for the first time and realized that the Catholic Church may not be as uptight as the world had made me think it to be. •

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