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Cathedral of the Sacred Heart

by Madison Bray

The name of the religious service that I went to was Cathedral of the Sacred Heart. The address of the Cathedral is 800 S. Cathedral Place, Richmond, Virginia, 23220. Their affiliation is Christianity, more specifically Catholic. The date that I attended service was Wednesday October 28, 2015 at 12:00 p.m. The name of the presiding official was Rev. Mr. Chris Malone, he is a Deacon of the church. The reason that the Deacon was presiding is because Rev. Monsignor Patrick Golden, the Rector was in the hospital for surgery. So, because of this the service was different then a normal mass that you would normally see if the Rector was presiding.

On the outside of the Cathedral itself it was beautiful. The stones were a light grey and everything seemed light and welcoming. The roof of the building was a green, but not a dark green, more of a light green color. This also added to the feeling of welcoming and almost like the building was trying to draw people to it. The inside of the building was beautiful, the stain glass, especially when the light shined on them added to this feeling of other worldliness and they captured your attention. On top of that there were certain things that were painted gold and when the light would hit them from the stain glass windows they took on this shimmering that made you look at them, but most importantly was Christ on the cross that was hung in the center and behind where the Deacon was conducting the service. Moving on to the actually walls and ceiling themselves,

they had paintings of what I can assume are different scenes in the bible, mostly with Christ and angels depicted throughout the building. The overall feel that I got from the building, inside and outside, was breath taking in the architecture.

The way that people greeted each other was with smiles before they all got on their knees in front of the pew to pray before the service. Now this is one of my questions that wasn't really answered but I believe that they prayed before their service to help them feel closer to their God before they came together to worship Him as a community. They greeted people that they had never seen before the same way, they would give a friendly smile or hello and then go to their knees to pray. I personally felt that this was great because coming in as an outsider to their faith I was afraid that I would be looked at like I wasn't welcome, and I was so happy to find out that that wasn't the case at all. In fact, One girl, Lindsey, that was sitting in the same pew as me actually made me feel really welcome and even asked if I was going to get communion. When I said I wasn't Catholic, I did know that If you aren't Catholic you can't receive communion, so she said that it was fine and that I could still get blessed by the Deacon. She explained that all I had to do was cross my arms over my chest and the Deacon would place his hand on my head and say a blessing for me. This whole experience made me feel less like an outsider and felt like it was ok that I was being involved in their

religion.

After the service, any questions that Lindsey didn't answer I went to the Deacon with and asked him. Now while he answered my questions he didn't seem all that thrilled by the idea either. He gave off a feeling like I should already know the answers to the questions that I was asking and that I should know that because I should be a believer and follower in his faith. I felt much more comfortable talking with the members of the congregation than the presiding official himself. Personally I feel that that shouldn't be the case at all and that not only the congregation but the presiding official should be easily approachable and also easy to talk to, especially in such cases of when someone of a different faith or someone who doesn't have any faith come into their church looking for what ever that person is looking for. Despite not being comfortable talking to the Deacon I was very comfortable talking to and asking questions to members of the congregation and I think it was because they were so open and nice about explaining things to me about their faith.

The sort of people in the community was actually very varied. All of them were in different social classes ranging from business men and women, house wives, students, even unemployed looking people were at the service. The ethnic background of the people that attended the service ranged so much so that you could only describe it as culturally diverse in every way. All the people looked like they all had different life experiences but they all came together to worship and share their faith with one another. The dominate gender at the service however was women. Even though the dominating gender wasn't dominate by that many numbers, there was about 6 more

women than there was men who attended the service. The age range was very varied as well, from age 18-80 with one 2 year old little boy who came with his mother, but mostly I would say that 25-30 years old is the average age of the people who attended the service. Finally the number present at the service was about 50 people.

When I first arrived the beginning of the service started with silence personal prayers. Then after that the presiding official would start with a prayer and moved one to reading a letter from St. Augustine. After that He explained the message that we were to receive from the letter and he moved on to other biblical scripts and giving us the messages that we should take from them and how they are connected together. We did stand and listen and sit and pray quite a lot which then began to make me wonder about how the older people in the room could handle that because at one point it started hurting my joints and so I can only imagine what it would be like for people with more problems with their joints. Finally the Deacon had finished out the service with communion as well as a prayer "Our father who are in heaven..." with their palms up and hands out, which I did learn was a way to show that they were excepting Christ into their life and spirit. Also another thing that I learned was that that able bodied people in the Catholic faith will kneel before sitting in the pew because of the crucifix and also because of the thing that they have that they believe is the embodiment of Christ.

The emotional tone of the service was very serious and solemn through out the entire time the service way going on. The opening of the service was neither dramatic or casual. The Deacon basically demanded the attention

of the congregation as he sat up from his seat to begin the service. Personally I think that the congregational participation was emotional for them personally but externally they looked reserved to the outside person. The service was very ritualistic in nature and stayed that way throughout the beginning of the service to the end of the service. The service ended with communion and the well blessing of your neighbor where people in the pews would turn to each other and shake hands and say “may blessings be with you”. There was a lot of art and symbolic images that I noticed all around the cathedral. They were of images Christ, Angels, and even the Saints. Most images I believe depicted scenes of the bible and biblical stories that the Catholic church connects with. The ritual of communion was used during the service as a way to take the blood and body of Christ into ones own body. Other than that that was really the only ritual that was used besides the continual praying that occurred throughout the service. •

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