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Cathedral of the Sacred Heart

by Antoniah Brown

The place I attended was: Cathedral of the Sacred Heart that is located at 800 S Cathedral Pl, Richmond, VA 23220. The Mass I attended was on Sunday, September 27 at 5:15 pm. This congregation's denominational affiliation is Catholicism. The presiding officials that day were The Most Reverend Francis X. DiLorenzo, Bishop of Richmond and Monsignor Patrick D. Golden, Rector.

Approaching the building on the outside it looks like a traditional Cathedral set up. The building is an off-white, cream looking color. There are Corinthian columns spanning the front face of the building on the Monroe Park side with stairs that lead to the entrance. Above the columns is a triangular arch with a message engraved within it, which I assume is a biblical reference if not a scripture. The top of the building has dome structures with ball and lanterns atop. The top is also colored a greenish hue, much like the Statue of Liberty, showing that it might have had a copper finish originally. There are several double door entrances leading into the main sanctuary.

When you entered the building it is arranged in the classic Gothic style of a crucifix. This meaning that it is in a cross style with the entrance part being longer with two sides extending off to the sides near the stage. It has pews in two main rows lining to the front of the main area. Then two off to the side where the upper part of this "cross" layout extends there are pews. The windows around the inner

sanctuary are stain glassed with what looked to be biblical portrayals. The ceilings are high with very intricate architectural details. There are also what could be frescos or painting made to look like frescos. Also, gold accents are on the arches and crown molding. Upon entering, you come into contact with a trio of glass double doors. Then, passing through those you are met with a square tub of sorts, which I later figured out was holy water. It was a very detailed and beautiful worship place to observe from both the inside and out.

When I entered the building I was greeted by an elderly white male. I think I was supposed to enter through the middle doors, but I entered through the left by accident. He handed me a brochure of sorts that contained information, hymns, and a sort of service agenda titled "Order of Mass". You are allowed to sit anywhere you wanted, so I took a seat closer to the back so I would be able to observe all around. Most of the people I saw were Caucasian males and females. However, I did see some African Americans and Hispanics from what I could tell from a person's general appearance. Social class, by the way people dressed, looked to be middle. The age range was quite diverse ranging from babies to the elderly. There was a good amount of college aged people in attendance. The number of people in attendance I would say was roughly 200 if not more. The Cathedral was not a massive place, so I doubt full capacity could hold more than 500. I was comfortable with talking

to those around me because they seemed friendly. Also, I had a friend with me so I think that helped with not feeling alienated. I did not have anyone offer to explain things, but since my friend knew slightly about Catholic tradition she explained for me throughout the service.

The emotional tone of the service was serious, but not like a stiff-necked type. When I entered I wish I would have gotten the memo that it is custom to dip your hand in the holy water and do a cross before going to your pew. As well as, when you arrive at your pew you are supposed to kneel before sliding into your seat. However, it was more calming to realize people all around could be seen in various attire ranging from sun dresses to one of those bright Virginia Commonwealth long sleeved shirts and a pair of jeans. So, although the overall mood was one of composure and prestige in a sense, it was there to ostracize. There was chatter before the service, although once it began it felt kind of formal and robotic. Not in a bad sense, but in that people seemed to be in a routine of knowing how things went and I was kind of looking around to blend in. Thankfully, the Order of Mass was like a guide for the clueless. There was a lot of standing, kneeling and hymns being sung. The opening would be what I call a "grand opening". There were four people that began at the back of the church and walked to the front all dressed in these white sort of robe tunic attire. Two were men, two were women. One of the men carried this brass looking pole with what looked to be a portrayal of Jesus on a cross, another a Bible looking book made from metals, and the two women had white candles. All throughout this there was an organ being played and someone singing a hymn. It was kind of ominous because I had no idea where

the organ was or where this mystery singer resided. She had a nice set of pipes though. Everything after that was literally in alignment with the Order of Mass. There was just a series of things occurring back to back in a very ritualistic manner. The only thing that was not as systematic was when, what I am assuming was the bishop, read a scripture and did a brief explanation.

He spoke on Mark 9:38-43, 45, 47-48, explaining that it was symbolic when it came down to dismembering oneself in order to gain access to heaven. Jesus did not mean to literally take out your eye, but more get rid of those things that are polluting your life. The congregation was very reserved, quietly listening and just kind of soaking in what he was saying with no verbal response. The service ended with a hymn being sung by the ominous voice and the exiting of the people in the white robes who were holding the same things they proceeded down the aisle in. Rituals that were done were an offering/tithes which is sort of paying your respects to the church and God in a sense. The other big one was the Eucharist, which is symbolic for the Last Supper when Christ did the breaking of bread and drinking of wine a representation of his body and blood before his crucifixion. Overall it was quite an interesting experience, brief, to the point, and then on your way. •

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