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Caroline Moore

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Cathedral of the Sacred Heart

by Callie Moore

On Sunday October 25, I attended a traditional Catholic Mass at the Cathedral of the Sacred Heart at 800 South Cathedral Place, right off of VCU's campus. The presiding officials were Most Reverend Francis X. Lorenzo, Bishop of Richmond, and Monsignor Patrick D. Golden, Rector.

Sacred Heart is arguably one of the most beautiful buildings in Richmond. It also holds true to the traditional cathedral architecture. The religious house has flying buttresses, pointed arches, and of course the beautiful rose window at the back of the church. I do have to say I was disappointed that I could not see the rose window from inside the cathedral, which is slightly unusual for the architecture. There are stained glass windows depicting different events from the Bible, and elaborately decorated walls and ceilings covered with intricate designs and gold accents. The high vaulted ceilings and large windows are supposed to give visitors an otherworldly feeling and be reminded of God's grandeur, glory, and power. There is also a tremendous organ located above the aisles at the front of the church that fills every inch of the room with music when it is played.

As I was waiting outside for my friend and classmate to arrive, I took note of the other people coming to the service. I noticed a large number of elderly people and families with young children, I accounted this to being because we were at the earlier service taking

place that day. Although I did notice some people of different ethnic background, the majority of the people attending the service were Caucasian. I could not really differentiate specific social classes. Some people were slightly dressed up with women in skirt or dresses and heels, and men in nice pants and sports coats and blazers. Others were simply in jeans and t-shirts, and there were many variations between the two. I took this to mean that this was a fairly casual service and that all were welcome.

I sat with my two friends who attended the service with me. We talked to each other, but not to any of the other attendees, nor did anyone go out of their way to talk to or welcome us. They did make a special announcement during the service to welcome any guests and asked all guests to raise their hands and the rest of the congregation gave a round of applause for those visiting as a welcome.

The service itself lasted an hour and consisted of a prelude, introit, processional hymn, penitential act, Kyrie, Gloria, collect, first reading, responsorial psalm, second reading, gospel acclamation, gospel, homily, creed, offertory hymn, offertory anthem, orate, fratres, Sanctus, mysterium fidei, great amen, the Lord's prayer, sign of peace, agnus die, communion antiphon, another collect, blessing and dismissal, recession, and a postlude. I learned some about the traditions of mass from a music history perspective, so I know that the services are

very symbolic and almost always are the same in order and content.

After we entered the cathedral, we were given programs for the order of the mass. As I observed other coming in I noticed that some would go to the marble vat of holy water and put their hands in before they sat down, or they would bow to one knee facing the back of the church and cross themselves with their hand before entering the pew.

I noticed a lot of other symbolic actions and gestures during the beginning and end of the service. Candles were ceremoniously lit before the start of the service and the preceding officials walked down the aisle once everyone else was seated, one of them carrying and gold and silver plated bible over his head. They exited the same way at the end of the service, before all of the attendees. Although I did not take communion because I am not baptized, I was aware of the symbolism of the bread and wine as the body and blood of Christ. I felt as if the congregation actively participated in the service when it came to singing and the call and responses between the congregation and the officials. Even though it may have been a more casual Catholic Mass, I would say it was still very dramatic and ceremonious.

There were two readings during the service, the first from Jeremiah 31: 7-9, and the second from Hebrews 5: 1-6. The second reading was actually one that we had talked about in class about the blind beggar. Having talked about the literal versus the figurative and deeper meaning of the scriptures in class, I was interested to see if it was taught. The official did indeed go into great depth and detail about the metaphor of the blind beggar and how we are all figuratively blind until we finally see the

light of Jesus and God.

Because I am not a Christian, much less a Catholic, I will probably not be going back to Sacred Heart. I did however, find my experience interesting and enlightening. The cathedral itself is stunning and a work of architectural art, and I will continue to admire it, now with a little more knowledge about what goes on inside of its walls. •

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