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St. Michael’s Catholic Church
by Megan Riggs

On Saturday September 26, 2015, I attended the 5:00 pm mass at St. Michael’s Catholic Church in Glen Allen, VA. It is located at 4491 Springfield Rd, Glen Allen, VA 23060. The presiding official’s name was pastor Dan O. Brady.

The building itself was beautiful. It was very large and had stained glass windows in the sanctuary. In the sanctuary, the chairs and pews were arranged in a large circle, and there was a space in the middle where the pastor delivered his sermon. There was a fountain near the front where people would put water on their forehead and cross themselves after the service. Visitors were greeted at the doors of the sanctuary and were handed pamphlets. There were many middle/upper middle class white people. It was actually the majority of the congregation. There were a handful of people from different nationalities, such as black and Asian. The predominate age group of the congregation was 40 and up. There were not many younger people there, so I felt out of place. There were children of the families, but not many people around my age group. I didn’t really notice anything about the gender mix. It seemed to be really even in terms of the ratios of male to female. In regards to how large the congregation was, there were quite a few people! Almost every single seat was filled.

Personally, I didn’t really feel comfortable sitting with and talking to those attending the service. Not because they seemed intimidating or rude or rude or anything, I’m just an awkward person by nature and I’m not really comfortable talking to people I don’t know. People were very willing to explain things to me. When it came time for communion, I had to ask the man next to me if I was able to participate considering I wasn’t Catholic. I told him that I was attending as part of my human spirituality class at VCU and that I had never been to a Catholic mass before. He explained the fact that I wasn’t able to participate because I wasn’t Catholic and I hadn’t had a “First Communion.”

I was nervous as I drove up to the church. I followed where other people were going, got a pamphlet from the greeters, and sat in one of the very first rows. I looked around me and took note of the building and the people around me. After maybe 5 minutes, the pastor walked in and asked everyone to bow his or her heads and he said a little prayer for the Pope because he was in DC. I thought that was very nice that he did that! I was actually kind of surprised that I didn’t expect that. He walked out after he was done and I was really confused, so I looked down at my phone at the time and realized he did that a bit early. He walked back in a few minutes later and asked everyone to rise and sing. There was A LOT of singing during the service. I was actually surprised! I had a Catholic friend come to church with me one time, and she remarked about how much Presbyterians sang! The good thing was they had the lyrics and the notes.
in the bulletin, so I wasn’t too confused. One thing that made me uncomfortable was he asked any visitors to stand, so I felt uncomfortable standing in front of many people I didn’t know. However, I did think it was nice that he welcomed all the visitors. There was a lot of congregational participation. Different members of the congregation walked up to the stand to read verses from the Bible. The service seemed to be ritualistic. It seemed to be very structured and not too spontaneous.

I really liked the pastor’s sermon. He talked about how everyone can be an angel to another person and change lives. He talked about his experiences where he really believed that he had met angels as they have changed his life for the better and confirmed what he believed was his path in life. He was very passionate when he spoke, and I admired that. He said that angels didn’t have to have wings and come from God to exist; they were all around us.

There were some rituals used that I had seen different variations of at my church. There was the offering, where they passed around baskets to raise money for the church, and Communion. Communion was the one that confused me because I didn’t know if I was allowed to participate until I asked the man next to me. The pastor got up and talked about how the wafer symbolized the body and flesh of Christ, broken for us, and the wine was the blood of Christ, shed for us. I had heard the same speech over and over from my pastor, except it was just worded differently. Each row was signaled to go up and partake in Communion. There were multiple different “stations” where there were two people to hand everyone the wafer and the cup. What I thought was interesting, was the fact that everyone drank from the same cup. The rim was wiped off after each person drank from it, but I still thought that was kind of weird. The service ended in song, which didn’t surprise me. We had already sung 6 different songs.

I noticed different fixtures and art pieces in the church. I loved the stained glass in the sanctuary; I thought it was simply beautiful. One thing that intrigued was the fountain and the door of the sanctuary. As everyone left, they would put a little bit of the water on their forehead and cross themselves. I didn’t know if it was a similar situation as Communion, so I just skipped it. I’m assuming it was seen as Holy water.

All in all, I really enjoyed my time there during the service. I really liked the pastor and his sermon; I thought it was very inspiring. If I was Catholic, I would definitely considering becoming a member. Everyone seemed very nice and welcoming.

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