

Archbishop Lori returns to Morgan State for Black History Month celebration

"I don't need to tell you about persevering faith."

Archbishop William E. Lori diverted from his prepared remarks on Abraham to emphasize the prophet's direct connection with many of the faithful gathered at Morgan State University's Memorial Chapel Feb. 25.

The archbishop spent a substantial portion of the Second Sunday of Lent celebrating Black History Month with Morgan State students, staff and members of the community who joined the ecumenical service.

"The archbishop is continuing to build a relationship here that has historical significance," said Victor R. McCrary, a parishioner of St. John the Evangelist in Columbia and vice president in the Division of Research and Economic Development at the historically black college.

In February 2017, when Morgan State was celebrating the 150th anniversary of its founding, Archbishop Lori became the first archbishop of Baltimore to celebrate Mass on its campus.

His liturgical return came 11 days after the release of his second pastoral letter, "The Enduring Power of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s Principles of Nonviolence." The printed program for the Feb. 25 service included the pastoral letter, in its entirety.

McCrary, a fourth-degree member of the Knights of Columbus Council 7559 who did his undergraduate work at The Catholic University of America in Washington, D.C., helped the Rev. Bernard Keels, dean of the chapel, arrange the archbishop's visit.

"The reasons are myriad," McCrary said. "The first is the vision he (Archbishop Lori) has for Baltimore; how do we make it a better place for all residents? At the end of the day, we are one Baltimore, no matter your faith, race or class."

The program's readings concluded with Deacon Wardell Barksdale, the Catholic chaplain for Morgan State, proclaiming the Gospel of Mark.

Worshippers ranged from Denise Blackwell, a parishioner of St. Mary of the Assumption in Govans; to Rob Spence, an assistant coach with the Bears' football program; to Mickal Hill, a freshman from Richmond who's majoring in journalism.

Hymns offered by the chapel's Gospel ensemble included "Oh, Freedom," an anthem of the Civil Rights movement which was written in the aftermath of the Civil War.

"The only thing we *had* is the most important thing we have," Keels said of the faith that strengthened African-American slaves, blacks during the Jim Crow era and those who continue the fight to end racism.

"We will never get to know each other until we get to heaven," Keels said, echoing "code" voiced in Birmingham, Ala., and elsewhere by earlier generations. "Well, if we don't take advantage of this opportunity, we're going to be miserable."

During the "Passing of the Peace," Keels encouraged all to spend a moment getting to know a stranger or two. Archbishop Lori came down from the altar and waded down the main aisle to do just that.

"From history we learn lessons not to be forgotten - as indeed the lessons of the Civil Rights movement have been forgotten by far too many people in the United States," the archbishop said in his homily. "And that includes people who count themselves as Christians."

During the benediction, Keels referenced a crisis in Baltimore that included 343 homicides in 2017, the deadliest year per capita in its history.

"I can't go to any more funerals," Keels said. "I'm all preached out about young people dying."

The service came one weekend after Archbishop Lori spoke at Chevrei Tzedek Congregation, a synagogue in Pikesville, and celebrated Mass on the first Sunday of

Lent at St. Bernardine in West Baltimore.

April 4 will mark the 50th anniversary of the assassination of King. To commemorate the event, the Rev. Raphael G. Warnock, senior pastor of Ebenezer Baptist Church in Atlanta, the spiritual home of King, will join Archbishop Lori for an ecumenical and interfaith prayer service April 12 at the Cathedral of Mary Our Queen in Homeland.

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