

# Archbishop O'Brien celebrates Mass for newly initiated

Archbishop Edwin F. O'Brien welcomed newly initiated Catholics to a Mass he celebrated for them at the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary on the third Sunday in Easter.

He asked the 150 neophytes, as they're known in church parlance, to stand while he and the congregation applauded them. Across the Archdiocese of Baltimore, a record 1,090 re welcomed into the fullness of the Catholic faith this year.

"These individuals have worked hard, not just learning but experiencing the mysteries of the church," O'Brien said.

In his homily, the archbishop explained how the liturgies following Easter remind the faithful of the special gifts Jesus left his church. The gift of the first Sunday after Easter is the forgiveness of sins, and the second Sunday focuses on the gift of faith. O'Brien cited the Bible verse where, after Jesus tells Thomas to touch the wound in his side, Jesus says, "Blessed are those who have not seen and who believe."

"That's who we are," O'Brien said. "That's who the neophytes are."

Sunday's Gospel detailed how Jesus appears to fishermen and tells them to cast their nets on the starboard side, and then feeds them with bread and fish, "and he's been feeding them in every age and time," O'Brien said. The Gospel also included Jesus inviting Peter to atone for denying him and instructing him to shepherd his flock.

"Shepherds go astray so often then as they do now," O'Brien said, but, "the gift of the office of Peter has kept us as one church throughout the ages." He noted that even though Catholics now and throughout history have been persecuted, they can't resist proclaiming Jesus' message.

He praised the newly initiated, whose "enthusiasm for your faith" serves as example to lifelong Catholics.

His message resonated with the newly initiated Catholics.

"This was absolutely wonderful to be here," said Joan MacDonald, who came from St. John, Westminster. "I've been to the basilica before, but not as a Catholic. It's great to be here with the archbishop."

"I'm looking forward to a beautiful Mass," Ginny Sells of Holy Trinity in Glen Burnie said a few moments before the Mass began. "I'm a convert from the Episcopal Church."

"It's exciting," said Anita Brown, also from Holy Trinity.

Trey Hayden of St. Paul's in Ellicott City said, he and his wife were happy to return to the basilica, their former parish. "Monsignor [James] Hobbs married us and baptized my eldest daughter," he said, adding that he appreciated the archbishop's effort to welcome the newly initiated. "The archbishop was holding it on behalf of the newly initiated and I'm one of the newly initiated. I think it was a nice thing he did and I wanted to take part in it and support the archbishop in anything he deigns to do."

Sharon Bogusz, coordinator of Evangelization and Adult Catechesis for the archdiocese, said this is the second year of inviting the newly initiated to Mass with the archbishop. The formation process recommends that they gather with their bishop.

"This way they get to have connection with a larger group," Bogusz said. She added they chose to celebrate the Mass at the basilica for its historic nature, not only to give participants a chance to see the basilica but also "to see the connection with history of those who walked in faith before them."