

Archbishop O'Brien tours Washington County

HAGERSTOWN – Standing beneath a large painting of the crucifixion at St. Ann in Hagerstown, Archbishop Edwin F. O'Brien challenged Washington County parishioners to "embrace" the crosses that come into their lives.

Speaking in a March 11 homily during his first stop in a daylong tour of Hagerstown-area parishes and schools, Archbishop O'Brien reminded Catholics they are called to identify the crosses of their lives as gifts from the Lord.

"Embrace them as a way to identify with what Christ did for us," he said.

The archbishop noted that early Christians were ashamed of the cross. Pagans mocked the cross as a sign of weakness, he said. But Christians came to recognize it as a symbol of strength.

"Sometimes, we're ashamed of the cross," he said. "We resent the cross and ask, 'Why do I have to do this?'"

Part of being a Christian is having courage to identify with the cross, he said.

"Jesus tells us to love our enemies," he said. "This is where the cross comes into our lives."

About 200 students from St. Maria Goretti High School in Hagerstown attended the morning Mass, along with more than 60 parishioners from throughout the region. Joining the archbishop for the liturgy were Father C. Douglas Kenney, pastor of St. Ann; Father Stephen Hook, pastor of St. James in Boonsboro and St. Augustine in Williamsport; Father John F. Lesnick, pastor of St. Peter in Hancock and St. Patrick in Little Orleans; Father Christopher P. Moore, pastor of St. Joseph in Hagerstown; and Monsignor Alfred E. Smith, retired pastor of St. Augustine.

Archbishop O'Brien's visit included stops at St. Maria Goretti, St. Mary, St. Mary School in Hagerstown, St. Joseph, St. Augustine and St. James. He also visited lower

Frederick County, stopping at St. Francis of Assisi in Brunswick and St. Mary in Petersville.

Since his Oct. 1 installation, Archbishop O'Brien has visited about 125 of the archdiocese's 151 parishes. He plans to visit them all, he said.

"People are very interested in the future of the church and the future of our schools," Archbishop O'Brien told The Catholic Review. "Their concern is very forward looking."

At the end of the liturgy, several St. Maria Goretti students asked Archbishop O'Brien to sign prayer cards as he greeted parishioners outside the church. On each card, the archbishop wrote, "Pray for future priests."

"I feel privileged that we could have him come to our church," said Chase Bachtell, a 14-year-old freshman and parishioner of St. Mary, Hagerstown.

Mary Lou Plum, a parishioner of St. Augustine, called the visit "pretty phenomenal."

"We're not in downtown Baltimore, so being up here is a little different," she said. "It makes us feel more connected to the archdiocese."

Daria Kaas, administrator of religious education at St. James, said the archbishop offered a "prophetic message."

"We're supposed to embrace the cross like Christ did and not try to turn away from it. When we drop our crosses, we're dropping the cross he has given us - they're meant for our growth and holiness."