

At May Procession, students honor Blessed Virgin with hearts, hands, voices

After a beautiful May Procession May 2, St. Agnes School's May Queen, Bridget Boland, sat quietly in the third pew of the Catonsville church and looked up at the statue of the Blessed Virgin Mary with reverence and love.

Dressed in a white, calf-length dress with a blue sash, which she made along with her grandmother, Bridget recalled the selection process to be chosen as the May Queen - an honor bestowed on one special eighth-grade girl.

Every year, each eighth-grade girl has the opportunity to write a reflective paragraph about the Blessed Mother, which serves as the basis for the selection of that year's May Queen.

Bridget wrote of her respect for the Blessed Mother, as the mother of all people as well as the mother of God.

"I was very excited and very nervous," she said of her opportunity to crown the Blessed Mother during Mass. "My heart was racing."

Grace Duffy, also an eighth-grader and the crown holder for Bridget, said, "Mary is a role model for us all. She is so humble and gentle and loving."

Both Bridget and Grace will attend Mount de Sales Academy, Catonsville, next year. Across the Archdiocese of Baltimore, many Catholic school children participate in the crowning of Mary, a tradition which dates back to the 16th century and symbolizes the honor given to her as the one chosen by God to bring his son into the world.

Fran Shaw, middle school social studies teacher and assistant principal at St. Agnes, has loved being a part of this spring event for the past 26 years.

"It's a beautiful day," she said, adding that the procession and liturgy in honor of Mary has changed little over the years. "The kids are so reverent and prayerful."

Speaking of the children who received the sacrament of Holy Communion the previous week, Ms. Shaw said, "this is the first time that the second-graders are able to receive Holy Communion at Mass with the rest of the school, and that's so special."

"The Blessed Mother holds a special place at St. Agnes Elementary School," said Ms. Shaw. "Our school sisters are the Sister Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, and they are celebrating their 75th year with St. Agnes."

In keeping with the school's long tradition, the 350 students, led by Father Timothy Fell, associate pastor, processed around the parking lot and into the church, reciting the rosary with St. Agnes pastor Father Carl Cummings leading the prayer.

The simple yet powerful procession touched the hearts of not only those participating. While the children processed carrying rosaries and fresh flowers, workmen just 30 feet away stopped their work on the construction of the parish's new multi-purpose center. They stood there with helmets in hand, watching the children and their teachers walk and pray in honor of the Blessed Mother.

The second-graders, in their First Communion outfits, led the student procession and lined the center aisle as an honor guard, while the other students reverently entered the church. In the background, the church was filled with soft music, played by Dan Baker, the school's music teacher.

The student procession ended with the eighth-graders filling the area around the Blessed Mother statue with numerous vases of beautifully fresh cut flowers, many of which were brought from their own homes.

After the procession, Father Fell began the liturgical celebration in honor of Mary, with the crowning ceremony following the homily.

Father Fell has participated in the school's May Procession and liturgy for the past four years, and he is touched by the prayerful attitude and atmosphere.

“The children are genuinely prayerful and not just lining up where they are told,” he said.

“And to hear the second-graders sing with such full voices, I’m sure this was very pleasing to the Blessed Mother, which was the whole point of the day.”