

Bahamian priest is a sensation at St. Gregory revival

Something out of the ordinary happened during this fall's revival at St. Gregory the Great, Baltimore.

Attendance grew each day of the three-day revival, a distinct contrast from previous years, when participation diminished with each consecutive assembly.

"I don't think it's a coincidence that the crowds grew the same year we had Father Elvado (Romando Gregory Turnquest of the Commonwealth of The Bahamas) leading the fall revival," said Monsignor Damien Nalepa, pastor of St. Gregory. "He has such a magnetic appeal and approach. I think the people who attended the first night went home and started telling their friends what a great experience it was."

Ordained just two years ago, the 33-year-old associate rector of St. Francis Xavier Cathedral, Nassau, was invited to lead the Oct. 15-17 revival when Monsignor Nalepa and parishioners from the church made one of their regular pilgrimages to The Bahamas earlier this year.

"There was something electrifying about (Father Turnquest) and I just knew he would bring something special to our revival," he said. "He involves the choir, the staff and the people in the pews in his Masses, and his sincere manner is gripping and inspirational."

Though separated by an ocean, the two parishes have a long collaborative history.

The St. Francis Xavier Cathedral Choir made the journey to Baltimore several times in the 1990s to perform at St. Gregory and Monsignor Nalepa has been taking groups of parishioners to the Bahamian church for spiritual pilgrimages for two decades.

Humbled when tapped to lead the 2007 Fall Revival, Father Turnquest said he was honored to make his first trip to Baltimore, but a little nervous about taking the reins of the annual event.

Themed "Get to Stepping with Jesus," the young priest said he was overwhelmed by

the warm reception he received by the West Baltimore congregation and bolstered by the growing turn out each night.

He encouraged the congregation to get to know themselves, understand their shortcomings, forgive themselves and prepare to receive God's grace.

"It's about forgiving ourselves and the people around us," Father Turnquest said. "We sometimes don't allow God to forgive us. We hold ourselves bound to a lot of crap. We have to release ourselves from those sins."

Though Catholics regularly recite the portion of the "Our Father" prayer that asks God to "forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us," he said people often don't embrace its true meaning.

"It's a hard gospel to accept," Father Turnquest said. "If we don't forgive, then we are holding ourselves bound to anger and revenge and it makes a home in our heart and it destroys us."

Forgiveness is a freeing experience he said can be done in the confessional or through a host of other sacraments. "When we clean our lampshades, we see the light. Then, we will shine brightness."

Drawing crowds of nearly 300 by the end of the event, Father Turnquest said his first experience leading a revival will not be his last and Monsignor Nalepa said he will call upon his young colleague to return for an encore.

"He fit in so powerfully," the parish pastor said. "He was received as our brother and our friend."