

Baltimore celebrates a saint



Catholic Review photo/George P. Matysek Jr.

Baltimoreans didn't let today's feast of St. John Neumann go by without a special celebration inside the downtown church he once served as pastor.

Following the 12:10 p.m. Mass at the Shrine of St. Alphonsus, dozens of worshippers formed a solemn line Jan. 5 to venerate a relic of the Bohemian-born saint. One by one, they prayerfully touched or kissed a piece of the saint's bone that was encased in a gold reliquary.

St. John Neumann, a Redemptorist priest and provincial leader for his religious order, served as St. Alphonsus' pastor from 1849-52. Pope Paul VI proclaimed him a saint June 19, 1977.

An image of the saint peered out from the church sanctuary, where a one-of-a-kind statue was on display. Designed by Franco Alessandrini and specially commissioned for St. Alphonsus, the newly installed statue shows St. John Neumann vested in his episcopal garb and seated on an ornate wooden chair.



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Monsignor Arthur Bastress, current St. Alphonsus pastor, explained that the artwork hearkens back to St. John Neumann's 1852 consecration at St. Alphonsus as the fourth Bishop of Philadelphia. It seems the chair used in the consecration had been borrowed from the nearby Cathedral of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary. After lying prostrate on the church floor, the new bishop was seated by Baltimore Archbishop Francis P. Kenrick.

"We still have that chair," Monsignor Bastress said with pride. He noted that Alessandrini used that exact chair as a model in designing the new St. John Neumann statue at St. Alphonsus.

In addition to marking St. John Neumann's feast day, today was also the launch of a yearlong celebration of the 200th anniversary of his birth. The saint is well-known for his humility, his promotion of eucharistic adoration, his outreach to immigrants and his support for Catholic schools.

Monsignor Bastress will present a 3 p.m. lecture at St. Alphonsus Jan. 8 on the "Missionary Spirit of St. John Neumann," followed by a Tridentine Mass. Archbishop Edwin F. O'Brien will celebrate a special 3 p.m. Mass at St. Alphonsus March 27, one day before the anniversary of St. John Neumann's birth and the 159th anniversary of his consecration as bishop.

Check out this Redemptorist site for more on St. John Neumann and this year's celebrations.