

Chicago man attends Mass at 365 parishes around the world in 365 days

CHICAGO - David Heimann's dream was to spend 365 days in 365 different places, each destination a new opportunity to experience Christ made flesh in our world today.

"Forget about it," his spiritual director told him. "If you can forget about it, then it was nothing, but if it keeps coming back to your heart, then it is something of the Spirit, and we need to pay attention to it."

He could not forget.

Mr. Heimann, 33, pastoral associate of St. Ignatius Parish in Chicago, has since made his dream a reality, having visited 365 different parishes around the globe in 2007 for daily Mass, with the support of Ad Sodalitatem, a group dedicated to "evoking solidarity in the Roman Catholic Church through prayer, education and development of the poor by building personal relationships with Christians throughout the world."

"I abandoned everything I knew," Mr. Heimann wrote in the blog he kept up each day of his travels. "I left my fishing nets at the boat. I followed."

Every day, he began with the same simple prayer: "Lord, lead me where you need me to go and show me what you need me to see." And every day he felt his prayer was answered.

On his pilgrimage, Mr. Heimann came to realize that true holiness comes from the miracle of Christ's body in the Eucharist, wherever it is celebrated.

"The beauty of the Eucharist is not in how much gold is around our tabernacles but how we have surrounded our hearts with the sanctuary of love we experience in the Eucharist," he said.

It was in this love that he found the consistent comfort of Christ's presence throughout such constant change.

"The Eucharist was the center of the experience - even when I felt lost and abandoned, I always understood the Eucharist," Mr. Heimann said. "You can go to a poor village in Zimbabwe and still experience the same love. It was always there."

Mr. Heimann said he now better understands "the mystery of the church as being one body yet diverse in its members."

"The Eastern church has a heart to the church, and the European and American have an intellect," Mr. Heimann said. "Africans have the soul of the church. The Latin church has a certain passion, almost like the blood of the church, and together they make a whole."

It was amid these diverse cultures that Mr. Heimann came across a different type of abandonment.

"I wish I could show people how their fellow Christians are begging for recognition and divinity, but they feel forgotten and abandoned," he said. "I wish I could show people that because they live in a Third World country they're not lacking in faith, but in fact they are abundant in it - they have so little, yet they have so much more faith than us with so much privilege."

Mr. Heimann now realizes that, more than a physical journey, it is the spiritual journey that counts.

"America doesn't do pilgrimage because we think we've already arrived," he said. "We think this is the Holy Land. In doing so we've lost that sense that there's another journey that we must make, one to the center that lives in the heart of every human being. This discipline of being a pilgrim is recognizing that our ultimate home is not here - our ultimate home is in heaven."

Mr. Heimann's travel blog and photos from his pilgrimage are online at: www.adsodalitatem.org.