

D.C. papal Mass a multicultural mix of ancient and modern

WASHINGTON – The liturgical celebration of Pope Benedict XVI's April 17 Mass in Nationals Park reflected the diversity of Catholic heritages and sensibilities reflected in the Archdiocese of Washington, where the Mass was held.

It acknowledged both the roots of tradition and the branches that have sprouted from those roots.

The prayer of the faithful was recited in six languages – English, Spanish, Korean, Vietnamese, Tagalog and Igbo. The sung response to the intentions incorporated three languages: English, Latin and Spanish.

The first reading – the account of how the apostles started speaking in tongues unknown to them at the first Pentecost – was proclaimed in Spanish.

Music composed in the 40 years since the conclusion of the Second Vatican Council was included, as were ancient Latin texts set to chant – and a Latin-language Gloria written in the past decade.

But not every song considered traditional was sung in Latin. The opening song for a 90-minute prelude before the 10 a.m. start of the Mass – which featured 1,300 clergy processing to their seats in deep left field and right field at Nationals Park – was “Plenty Good Room,” a traditional spiritual.

The prelude time also included “Halle, Hallelujah,” a traditional Caribbean song, and “Let’Isikia,” a traditional Zulu and South African melody.

The music of Leon Roberts, a long-respected African-American Catholic composer, was represented by “I Call Upon You, God” during the prelude and a Greek-language “Kyrie.”

The late Alexander Peloquin, a Rhode Island composer and choral conductor who embraced the concept of music in the vernacular, had his powerful setting of Psalm

104, “Lord Send Out Your Spirit,” used for the responsorial psalm. A pre-Mass song based on the same psalm had verses in Latin, Pilipino and English, then Vietnamese and English, followed by a verse in Spanish.

Hymn tunes dating back centuries were used as the basis for “Holy God, We Praise Thy Name,” “O Holy Spirit, By Whose Breath” and “Lord, You Give the Great Commandment.”

Marty Haugen, whose compositions are now part and parcel of virtually every Catholic hymnal, had three acclamations from his widely popular “Mass of Creation” used during the Liturgy of the Eucharist.

His setting for the Great Amen was followed by the chant version of the English-language Our Father long used in American parishes.

A generous sampling of songs in Spanish, including one set to a meringue beat, was incorporated into the Mass, and even one song in French was used before the liturgy.

The Latin language was well represented, beginning with a rendition of Wolfgang Mozart’s “Ave Verum” before Mass, and the ninth-century Latin chant “Veni Creator Spiritus” as the procession of bishops prior to Mass was nearing its end.

A 2001 setting of the Gloria and a 1991 setting of the Lamb of God, both in Latin, were featured during the Mass.

Opera star Placido Domingo elicited applause from the assembly after he sang the opening phrase of “Panis Angelicus” and his face appeared on the big television screen positioned above the right-center field stands.