

Eucharistic prayer retreat inspires faith and provides challenge

EMMITSBURG - As two seminarians took turns carrying the Blessed Sacrament through a crowd of more than 1,000 young people at Mount St. Mary's University Feb. 9, tears streamed down the cheeks of some as they peered at the consecrated host held aloft in a gleaming monstrance. Others warmly embraced their peers during the hour-long procession or seemed transfixed by the reality of Christ's presence.

With lights dimmed and a band blaring sacred music, the solemn procession was one of the most-anticipated moments of Mount 2000, a eucharistic prayer retreat held Feb. 8-10 on the campus of Mount St. Mary's. The annual gathering was organized by seminarians of Mount St. Mary's Seminary, who also led small-group discussions with participants.

"The procession year to year is moving because you are all there for the same reason," said Julia Johnson, a 15-year-old parishioner of St. John in Westminster.

Invited by seminarians to share their experience of the eucharistic procession at the end of the Feb. 9 session, many young people raced to the microphone to describe their emotions. A common theme was that Christ was alive in them.

Throughout the retreat, many participants knelt in front of the Blessed Sacrament during eucharistic adoration. There were also opportunities to receive the sacrament of reconciliation.

Monic Rubeling, 16-year-old parishioner of St. Peter the Apostle in Libertytown, has attended Mount 2000 for the past two years and values her time during eucharistic adoration.

"Every year it builds my faith more and more," she said.

The retreat featured guest speakers who discussed faith, hope and charity. Sister Ann Immaculee of the Sisters of Life was the guest speaker Feb. 9.

“Love is living and alive,” she said, reminding the audience of Jesus’ words, “you are not an orphan, you have a father who sent me. Be not afraid.”

Her words echoed throughout the gymnasium, inciting a loud round of cheers and applause.

In his homily at the closing Mass Feb. 10, Arlington Bishop Michael F. Burbidge asked young people to resist settling for mediocrity.

“It is my hope and prayer, my dear young fiends, that above all else this weekend, you go home ever convinced of God’s love for you,” Bishop Burbidge said.

He noted that God will never give up on them. God simply asks that they never give up on themselves, Bishop Burbidge said.

The bishop challenged young people to think about what God may be asking them to let go of, whether that be habits, harmful ways of living, substances, relationships, grudges or something else. Consider what “worldly idols” they may turn to for “temporary escape” when they experience setbacks or disappointments, he said.

“Make this promise the next time this happens,” he said, “that the first one I’m going to turn to is (God).”

Bishop Burbidge noted that God is not asking young people merely to go home and pray. That is good, he said, but not enough.

“He’s asking you to extend yourself,” Bishop Burbidge said, challenging audience members to show their love for God in the way they love one another.

“God will use your kindness, your compassion and your service in ways you can’t even imagine to touch the hearts of others,” he said.

Sam Huffer an 18-year-old parishioner of St. Peter the Apostle in Libertytown, said the retreat was “a moving experience.” The enthusiasm of the participants was contagious, he said.

For Sophia Stinson, a 14-year-old freshman at Linganore High School in Frederick, Mount 2000 was a new experience.

“My sisters went in years past and originally were against attending,” she said, “but they ended up talking about how great of an experience it was. That’s what motivated me to go.”

Stinson, a parishioner of St. Peter the Apostle in Libertytown, came to the event with two friends from high school, Genny Cretella and Maria Applegate, both 14-year-old freshmen. The teens explained that even after one day at the retreat they felt more connected to the Lord.

“We learned that your best ability is availability,” Applegate said.

For them, that means taking more moments out of the day for God and learning to put away their cell phones.

Frederick Community College student Ronan Bogley, 21, from St. Peter the Apostle Parish in Libertytown, said Mount 2000 “rejuvenates” and “kickstarts” his faith. This was the fourth year he has attended.

“After the retreat you’re alive, you are on fire, but maintaining that is hard because life - exams, chores, jobs - gets in the way of the high and you have to constantly remind yourself of the promise you made on this inspiring retreat,” Bogley explained.

At the end of the Feb. 10 liturgy, Father Steven Roth, vocations director for the Archdiocese of Baltimore, discussed the call to religious life and encouraged those thinking about religious life to stand so others could pray for them. He encouraged all who attended Mount 2000 to spread what they learned during the retreat.

“It is your witness, your availability, your understanding of returning to the source of Jesus himself that has brought us together this weekend and continues to bring our church together,” he said. “We know together we are stronger.”

George Matysek Jr. contributed to this story.