

'Face of the Basilica' provides welcoming presence



Faces of Faith

When visitors arrive at the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary in Baltimore, Mark Marozza is the man they are most likely to encounter.

"People share their stories with him - their pains and struggles and everything from sicknesses to you name it," said Father James Boric, rector. "He prays with them. He listens to them. He takes care of them."

The longtime sacristan's welcoming presence isn't confined to the walls of the grand neoclassical church that was established as the first cathedral in the United States after the adoption of the U.S. Constitution.

Walking the streets of downtown Baltimore, Marozza greets everyone with a smile - including the poor and homeless who are more accustomed to averted gazes.

"Mark treats them like human beings with respect and dignity," Father Boric said. "He knows their stories and prays with them. The people on the street know Mark has a tremendous heart and that there's nobody he wouldn't help."



Now the longest-serving current employee of the Baltimore Basilica, Marozza has been a fixture at the historic site for more than 20 years. Although Marozza's official

title is “sacristan,” Father Boric refers to the 57-year-old parishioner as the “face of the basilica.”

Born in Baltimore and raised in St. John the Evangelist Parish in Severna Park, Marozza’s faith is fueled in large measure by his devotion to Carmelite spirituality and its focus on simplicity and contemplation. His grandmother became a Discalced Carmelite nun in Rhode Island following the death of her husband. Marozza remembers visiting her and other nuns, speaking to the fully-habited cloistered sisters from behind a grill.

In his 20s, at the invitation of his mother, Marozza joined the Discalced Carmelite secular order. He served as its president for two terms.

Marozza’s association with the basilica began in 1994. The graduate of Archbishop Spalding High School had been attending daily Mass at the Cathedral Street shrine for about half a year when a basilica employee asked him if he was interested in working there.

Beginning on a part-time basis while keeping another position, Marozza helped clean the building, waxed the floors, served Mass, gave tours and tended to other daily needs.

Now working fulltime, Marozza is responsible for making sure the liturgies run smoothly. He prepares in advance – laying out vestments, tending to candles, making sure there are lectors and extraordinary ministers of holy Communion, ordering flower arrangements, keeping incense and other liturgical items in stock, placing missalettes in pews, among a host of other duties.

“There are more things in that sacristy than anybody in the Archdiocese of Baltimore knows about,” Father Boric said, “but Mark knows where everything is. He has it all organized.”

Marozza is the altar server at the 12:10 p.m. daily Mass and the 5:30 p.m. Saturday Mass. He attends wedding rehearsals and is present at all marriages to make sure the celebrations go smoothly.

“I’m detailed-oriented,” said Marozza, sitting in the basilica’s sacristy during a

recent break from his many duties. “It’s the little things that kind of count. I like to keep the place looking good.”

Marozza, a soft-spoken man who had seriously considered becoming a Passionist or Carmelite priest before discerning that religious life was not for him, has had a love for his faith from an early age.

“Since childhood, I just knew – always – that it was the true faith,” Marozza said. “I’ve always felt that the Catholic faith is the truth and that it’s the only way I’m going to get to heaven.”

Being at the basilica has given Marozza the opportunity to serve Mass for cardinals and archbishops. He’s also taken advantage of recent spiritual offerings such as a Discovering Christ series and the Our Lady of Fatima Rosary Congress, which inspired him to commit to praying the rosary on a more regular basis.

Marozza does a Tuesday holy hour in the basilica’s undercroft adoration chapel and fills in for other hours when no one is present with the exposed Blessed Sacrament.

“He prays for the mission,” Father Boric said. “That’s what Mark naturally does.”

Marozza said he values the many friendships he’s made among the basilica’s staff over the last two decades. He views his service at the cathedral as a blessing in his life.

“I think it’s special to work in God’s house,” he said.

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