

# **In streets of Little Italy, St. Leo parishioners remember Christ's sacrifice**

As four men clad in black robes rolled a large statue of the body of Christ through the streets of Little Italy during St. Leo's April 18 celebration of the outdoor Stations of the Cross, a gray-bearded bystander watched with wide eyes from a sidewalk.

"Thank you, Jesus," the man said softly, waving an arm in the air and munching on potato chips even as he appeared a bit unstable on his feet. "Thank you, Jesus."

Nearby, white-haired women peeked out formstone-clad row homes. Young couples with children also looked on, snapping photos of the passing spectacle. Still others made the Sign of the Cross as the procession proceeded.

For parishioners of St. Leo, the annual Good Friday commemoration was meant to bear witness to Christ's crucifixion and death. It was a celebration of Jesus' sacrifice for all people.

"Why is this day 'Good' Friday?" asked Deacon Kevin Bagley, speaking in a homily at a liturgy inside the church that preceded the procession. "It's 'good' because nothing but good came from Christ's sacrifice for us. Because of that sacrifice, we now have the opportunity to go to heaven."

Approximately 150 parishioners participated in the procession, accompanied by the solemn drum playing of Leo Otterbein and a sword-wielding, white-gloved honor guard from the St. Vincent Pallotti Council of the Knights of Columbus.

Black rosary beads clinked by the sides of the men who guided the statue through the neighborhood. Clergymen wore bright red vestments, symbolic of the blood Christ shed at his passion.

The crowd paused every few feet at the homes of parishioners or local businesses, where framed paintings of the 14 Stations of the Cross were displayed.

Outside the home of Philomena Scalia on Stiles Street, believers prayed the Second Station of the Cross, "Jesus Takes up His Cross." Scalia led prayers with a bullhorn, as would parishioners at the other 13 stops.

Scalia said the celebration was an important event in the life of her faith community. Commemorating Christ's passion is a reminder of the ongoing suffering that remains in the world today, she said.

"It's always the same thing - people being persecuted, not necessarily just the Catholics, but other religions, too," said Scalia, who has been a St. Leo parishioner all of her 85 years. "I'm very devoted to the Passion."

Vince Culotta, owner of Sabatino's Restaurant, said the procession was a way of carrying on a long tradition at his parish. This was the second year parishioners walked with the corpus figure on a rolling platform, but similar processions have taken place for at least a decade featuring a horse-drawn carriage on which the Christ statue rested.

"We're all supporters of the church," said Culotta, as the smell of baking garlic bread hung in the air from nearby restaurants. "This is a good thing to keep going."

"American Joe" Miedusiewski, a former state senator who represented Little Italy and the surrounding area, participated in the procession with his wife, Pat. Both are parishioners of Our Lady of Grace in Parkton.

"To come back here really warms your heart," he said.

The Miedusiewskis said they hope the tradition can be maintained for years to come.

Pallottine Father Salvatore Furnari, St. Leo's pastor, said the annual public display of faith isn't meant to be a one-time event.

"The important thing is that we imitate Christ not only on this day along the Way of the Cross, but that we imitate him every day, in all our daily duties and sacrifices," he said. "The imitation of Christ should be a part of our lives and it should be a part of the very fiber of our being as baptized Catholics."

Ed Volatile, a fourth-generation parishioner of St. Leo and a member of the Knights of Columbus, called the annual Good Friday procession a witness of faith.

“We got faith,” he said, “and we ain’t ashamed of it.”

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*Email George Matysek at [gmatysek@CatholicReview.org](mailto:gmatysek@CatholicReview.org)*