

May is for Mary

At St. Joan of Arc School in Aberdeen, we always take a moment or two to honor the Blessed Mother during the month of May. This year was extra special as we participated in a May procession, which began in the church with two songs and an abbreviated rosary. When we left the church, we sang “Ave, Ave, Ave Maria! Mother of Jesus, mother of God” as one body and gathered in my new favorite place at SJA: our newly renovated grotto.

Former SJA student Joshua Cox (who is now a Junior at Aberdeen High) has chosen to serve our parish with his Eagle Scout project, a restoration of Mary’s sacred place at SJA. Our statue of Mary, enrobed in radiant blue, has been tucked away into a cozy stone structure for ages. She is stored safely inside for the winter, but even though we cannot see her, we still feel her presence. Mary’s reappearance at the grotto is a sure sign of spring for all of us at SJA, but when we witnessed her today, in the new home Josh built for her, heaven felt even closer.

Joshua created a wide path of mulch before her and dotted it with colorful stepping stones. He planted perennials at her feet, which are always a reminder that our lives, through Christ, are eternal. A small gathering of wind chimes tink in the gentle breeze while a gentle bubbling fountain tower contributes to the song. A beautiful bench provides a place to rest and meditate.

Joshua transformed a quiet, simple place into sanctuary. He inspired me to create such a place in my own home. I can start with a sacred object, like a statue or a painting, then add the sensory details, like a candle or a few plants, to help make my prayer more focused.

Anyone can be the curator of a DIY shrine for themselves to enjoy, but it took someone very special to create something so meaningful for his parish community. The children lit up when they saw how welcoming this “new” place was for them. After a beautiful speech by Deacon Ray Van Pelt, each class took turns presenting Mary with flowers. At the end of the event, Mary was surrounded with a bouquet as bright and diverse as the children who honored her that afternoon. I am willing to believe that after taking part in the spiritual experience Joshua Cox provided for

everyone at St. Joan of Arc, at least a few young hearts drew nearer to the mother of their friend Jesus.