

Monstrance fished from reservoir centerpiece of new adoration chapel

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A man fishing at the Loch Raven Reservoir in north Baltimore County some two decades ago was convinced he had snagged a big fish when his line hooked something substantial.

After reeling in his haul, the angler had no fish. He had, however, caught something even more remarkable: a large Gothic monstrance used by Catholics to hold the Eucharist for worship.

Unsure what the ornate object was, but thinking it looked “churchy,” the man took the monstrance to a local Catholic church. A priest examined the vessel, suggesting that the man take the beautiful brass finding to the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary in Baltimore, where it subsequently remained in storage for years.

During a joyous Nov. 23 Mass that attracted hundreds of people to the historic basilica, Archbishop William E. Lori placed a consecrated host inside the restored monstrance fished from the water and carried it in a solemn procession to the church’s undercroft.

There, he placed the monstrance atop a gleaming altar inside a new adoration chapel he dedicated to be used in a special way to pray for vocations to the priesthood and consecrated life.

“Using a monstrance fished out of a lake, we will ask the Lord to send us new ‘fishers of men,’ ” Archbishop Lori said in his homily prior to dedicating the new chapel, “both here in the Archdiocese of Baltimore and in the whole church.”

How the monstrance found its way into the reservoir is a mystery, Archbishop Lori

said, “but how it found its way here to the basilica is a remarkable sign of God’s providence.”

Archbishop Lori announced that the new adoration chapel will be dedicated to the basilica’s 24th rector, Monsignor Arthur Valenzano, in gratitude for his “goodness and priestly example.” The surprise announcement stirred the congregation to give the priest a prolonged standing ovation during which Monsignor Valenzano, who is battling cancer, smiled and placed a hand over his heart.

Monsignor Valenzano established a small adoration chapel in the same spot as the new one in 2011. It is located near the tombs of several archbishops of Baltimore, including the nation’s first bishop, Archbishop John Carroll.

The new chapel features an altar inspired by the basilica’s side altars in the upper church. The adoration chapel altar includes an octagonal baldacchino, a canopy with metal shingles that Archbishop Lori said were set in a pattern inspired by the design of the dome of St. Peter’s Basilica in Vatican City.

“The tiles of blue glass which cover the interior of the baldacchino and serve as a backdrop for the monstrance recall the water of the lake from which the monstrance emerged,” Archbishop Lori said, “and also the words of the Lord to the Apostles, the first fishers of men, to ‘put out into the deep.’ ”

Monsignor Valenzano told the Catholic Review he hopes people will visit the chapel frequently to pray and draw closer to Christ by making a holy hour before the Blessed Sacrament.

“At first, a holy hour can seem like an obligation,” the rector said, “but eventually, it seems more like an opportunity. It’s a time when we communicate silently with God and God communicates with us. It really becomes a game changer.”

Archbishop Lori is encouraging employees of the Catholic Center to devote a holy hour during their workweek, with the permission of their supervisors. The chapel is open Monday through Friday from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m.

There are currently 20 scheduled adorers, according to Kathy Wandishin, the basilica’s ministry coordinator. Parishioners, Catholic Center staff and others in the

community regularly visit the chapel, she said.

“It’s an exceptionally beautiful place,” said Wandishin, noting that the chapel seats eight. “You go there and you are transformed. It’s an oasis away from everyday life, and you’re there with the Lord and you know everything is OK.”

Among the priests present for the dedication Mass was Father Joseph Marcello, a Connecticut clergyman and Archbishop Lori’s former priest-secretary in Baltimore, who was instrumental in the chapel’s design. Jim Suttner of Rohrer Studio in Baltimore was the architect and CAM Construction was the builder. A grant from the Andreas Foundation helped make the chapel possible.

Monsignor Valenzano noted that a display in honor of the women and men religious who have served the Archdiocese of Baltimore, previously housed in the alcove where the chapel is located, will be relocated to another spot in the basilica.

Father Michael DeAscanis, vocations director for the archdiocese, said he believes prayer in the chapel will have a direct impact on vocations.

“Don’t just pray for vocations generically, but particularly,” he said. “Pray for the young people you know – your children, grandchildren, godchildren – simply that God’s will be done.”

An inscription above the side entryways of the chapel will constantly remind adorers of the power of prayer. Taken from the Gospel of Luke, it reads:

“The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few. Pray therefore the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest.”

For information about signing up for a holy hour in the chapel, call 410-727-3564, x220.

Editor’s note:

Monsignor Valenzano died in 2015. Read more about his life:

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