

Mount 2008 proves rousing success

It's not often seminarians are treated like rock stars, with the crowd drumming their feet on the bleachers and applauding.

But at Mount 2008 in Emmitsburg on Feb. 10, that was the appreciative response from more than 1,600 high school students and chaperones when the seminarians were acknowledged at the closing Mass of the weekend retreat.

Mount 2008 is an annual Eucharistic retreat for high school students held at Mount St. Mary's University; this year's theme was "to seek the face of Christ." Students come from as far south as Atlanta, as far north as Vermont, and as far west as Illinois.

About 22 percent are from the Baltimore area, said Steven Borello, a seminarian from Peoria, Ill., who was handling registration.

Tom Crowe, a seminarian from Arlington, Va., said the retreat is a call to conversion and a way to give youths "a spiritual game plan - how to go about being Catholic every day in life."

The retreat featured talks on vocations, focusing on the call to marriage and the call to religious life.

Father Brett A. Brannen, vice rector at Mount St. Mary's Seminary, concluded the retreat by saying, "I want to speak with you briefly about something that's going on in some of your hearts ... please don't tell me you're not holy enough - Jesus Christ the Redeemer of Man has the power to make you as holy as you need to be to do the work he needs you to do."

He then asked everyone to close their eyes, quoting Blessed Mother Teresa of Calcutta who said God only speaks to a silent heart. "Silence your hearts and listen," he said, and then asked students who were thinking about a vocation to raise their hands.

"Your soul is like a coffee cup upside down on a saucer," he said. "Turn it up and let Jesus fill it up." He urged students to "tell Jesus 'yes' - even if you're not sure of the question." He asked students who thought God might be calling them to stand up. Then he asked everyone to open their eyes and applaud the nearly 200 students who were standing. Those youths gave their names to seminarians, who will pray for them.

By any measure, the weekend was a success.

"We had to turn away several hundred people," said Father Leo Patalinghug, director of pastoral field education at Mount St. Mary's Seminary. "It inspired me - it helps me to confirm my own priesthood and our responsibility for our young people."

Michael Moubarek from Jefferson, Md., said it was his second time at Mount 2000. "I really loved it," he said. "It's just so amazing. You go on some retreats that are fun and you have fellowship, but this is a Eucharistic retreat - it's you and God. The atmosphere is incredible."

"It cleared things up for me," said Rebecca Rouse, a member of St. Michael, Poplar Springs, adding she particularly liked the speakers.

"I liked the Benediction; I love Benediction," said Christine Guaragno from Spring Grove, Pa.

Archbishop Edwin F. O'Brien celebrated the closing Mass. He and Bishop W. Francis

Malooly, western vicar, also received a hearty response from the crowd when they were introduced as “two men who are the very successors of Jesus Christ.”

“Are you happy to be here?” Archbishop O’Brien asked. A wave of thunderous applause answered him. When he asked the crowd if they were grateful to the sisters, priests and seminarians, the crowd responded with prolonged applause.

“What an encouraging sight this is and what a joy it is to know the church is so very much alive among our young people,” Archbishop O’Brien said.