

Rowdiness to reflection in Federal Hill

By Philip Porter

Special to the Review

The lights are bright July 25 inside M&T Bank Stadium, where Billy Joel is performing his greatest hits in front of an enormous, crooning crowd.

The streets of Federal Hill are frenetic as cars circle the blocks to find parking, only to find the garages full and the streets packed. Horns honk, people yell and engines rev as the Saturday night crowd makes its way to the restaurants and bars that constitute the nightlife in the area surrounding Cross Street Market. A major event in a stadium, young people rushing to meet their friends, no parking, frantic drivers losing their patience – this pilgrimage into the heart of South Baltimore could be taking place any weekend.

Just two blocks away, however, a story of a different kind of pilgrimage is unfolding in Holy Cross Church. There are more candles lit than lightbulbs, and the cavernous heart of the 150-year-old church in the heart of Federal Hill softens the illumination even as the marble floors and plaster archways magnify the gentle sound of vocals sung over violin and acoustic guitar interspersed with Scripture readings to guide people's reflection.

The great wooden doors atop the church's granite steps have been thrown open to the night. Participants in ChristLife, the Baltimore Frassati Fellowship and the Catholic Community of South Baltimore's young adult group come together and are invited by Holy Cross's pastor, Father Patrick Carrion, to live out the teaching of Pope Francis: "Everyone must be a missionary, everyone can hear that call of Jesus and go forth and proclaim the kingdom!"

Sent out in pairs, "two by two" (Mk 6:7), young adults from around the Archdiocese of Baltimore step out into the busy streets intent on meeting people, wherever they

are. With this missionary spirit, the night's event, "Francis in the Streets," inspired by similar outreaches in other American cities, hopes to facilitate an encounter with the Lord, present in the sanctuary of Holy Cross.

Throughout the evening, responding to an invitation, a steady stream of pilgrims from diverse backgrounds, faith traditions and economic circumstances change their intended path for a moment to enter the church. The invitation is simple: "Come, spend a few moments with God." Inside Holy Cross exists a space for quiet contemplation that stands in stark contrast to the chaotic excitement outside on the street.

There are Bibles and rosaries available for those who wish to take them, and a basket of candles beckons visitors to the front of the church, where they are welcomed to light one for an intention and place it upon the altar of sacrifice. In alcoves on either side on the aisles sit priests, prepared to listen, answer questions or hear confessions. Some of the visitors enter quickly, say a prayer, light a candle and leave. Others linger to hear Scripture read aloud and appreciate the reverent, peaceful atmosphere as it alternates between music and silence.

However long they remain, two minutes or two hours, the decision to step off the street and into Holy Cross makes them pilgrims of another order. For those few moments, at least, their journey is definitively toward God.

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