

Sharing the Light of Christ at The African American Heritage Festival

Black Catholic churches in the city play an integral role of providing Christian witness, social outreach and the unlimited hope that comes from knowing Jesus to those in the village. In these parishes you will find evangelizers rolling away the stones that block blessings and sharing the good news of Jesus Christ as light for the journey.

This is why 30 African American Catholics from 10 parishes showed up and spoke up about the joy of knowing Jesus at the annual African American Heritage Festival at Camden Yards last weekend. This was our opportunity to witness and evangelize. We joyfully put on the helmet of faith, knowing full well that what was done in the name of Jesus and in the spirit of love would be blest.

Situated on Community Row, nestled between the Educate Online and Voter's Registration booths on one side and the National Aquarium and Community Mediation Booths on the other, stood Booth 5 - The African American Catholic Ministries Booth. We reported for duty in gray T-shirts (an Aziza Cooper design) that read ...“Property of Jesus Christ - Strength Training Workout, Sixty Minutes every Sunday Makes you tougher than Nails.” A cross was drawn in the middle of the T-shirts. We gave out information about black Catholic history in Baltimore and a listing of black Catholic Parishes, inviting folks we met to come and do some “spiritual strength training workouts” at one of our Catholic Churches. Additionally, we were engaged with about 2,000 people, one-on-one as we extended the greeting, “If Jesus is your light, come on and turn on the light of Christ,” and gave people a cross that could be turned on.

Many were amazed that Catholics were bold in their proclamation of Christ and warmly received our message and handouts. Our neighbors were impressed that we built circles of prayer before we began. Some people asked particularly about our churches, their location, ministries and of course, where and how they could obtain a T-shirt. We were delighted and bragged that everywhere you go in Baltimore, stands a Catholic Church postured for “spiritual strength training” so that one can

navigate through these times and challenges. Catholics who attended the festival were proud that we were present, working in the vineyard. A few people refused our message, and our response to them was a silent prayer for them in our hearts. However, there were some among us who mingled among the crowds just sharing joy in Christ, testifying everywhere. Sister Anthonia Ugwu, O.S.P., Leonard Patterson, Mary Clayton, Marie Washington, Patricia West and Darlene and Michael Norton worked the crowd. They were a grand sight to see and became a prayer in motion. The other coworkers in the vineyard, staffing our booth on mission, included John Tony Berkley, Annye Bynum, Debbie Edwards, Shawn and Mia Griffin, Phyllis Ham, Audrey Hanna, Marie Harvin, Millicent Hawkins, Gloria Herndon, Joann T. Logan, Sister Charlotte Marshall O.S.P, Dorothy McCutheon, DeSales Miller, Sandra Middleton Morgan, Howard Roberts, Alice Smallwood, Walter Stokes, Dorothy Stokes Wallace, Cheryl Weems, Christine White and Doris Woodus.

Much can be gained from this experience. First, it is proof positive that witnessing for Christ is one of the greatest privileges of life, second to knowing him! Pope Benedict XVI reminded us during his visit this spring that as believers, we are sent by Christ into the world to be his witnesses. It is his will that we proclaim the gospel of his grace wherever we go. Dr. Edward Pauley writes “God’s love sent Christ into the world for us, and Christ’s love sends us into the world for others. It is a joyful privilege to be in Christ’s service, and even to suffer for his sake. The wonder of it all is that the one who sends us goes with us, and even goes before to prepare the way!”

Thank you – all who served and were on mission. I am grateful for all you do in the name of Jesus.

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