

St. Ignatius Martyr in Austin, Texas

Every year for our anniversary, Patrick and I try to visit someplace different. This year landed us in Austin, Texas, thanks to a recommendation by a longtime friend who is an artist. Plus, Austin is known for great food and music. We'd heard the phrase "Keep Austin Weird," and proceeded with caution and curiosity.

We didn't find Austin to be all that weird. People were quite friendly. The food was even better than we'd imagined. And we found ourselves most impressed by the architecture of the houses in the neighborhoods we traversed in our journey from one restaurant to the next. Every house was unique, many were colorful, and great care was taken in adding the little touches that whispered, "home."

We stayed in a cottage ourselves, and our incredibly helpful innkeeper, Sovay, was glad to oblige when we asked her to help us find a mission-style Catholic church. She led us to St. Ignatius Martyr, a short bus ride away.

I admit I was a little disappointed when I first saw the building. I was hoping to step back in time in a historical, pueblo-style church. This cream bricked church looked to be about the same age as mine, which was built in 1965 (I later discovered that they're exactly the same age). It did, however, boast the characteristic mission arches I was looking for. At the center of the second story stood an intricate stained glass image of St. Ignatius in reds, yellows, and many shades of blue.



Inside, an alabaster glow exuded from the white marble on the altar. The risen Christ superimposed on the crucifix saw over the space. Two mission-paned glass rooms flanked the altar, with the one on the left housing the musicians and choir. Four sections of oak pews were lit by a gilded chandelier with faux pillar candles, dozens of radiant white and chrome pendant lights, and predominately blue stained glass skylights. The whole place felt warm, and I'm not talking about the Texas heat. Mass began with the priest asking us to greet each other. I wondered if this was the way "peace" is shared in the Archdiocese of Austin, but we shook hands again after saying the "Our Father." The music was outstanding, as is to be expected in Austin. I couldn't even keep track of the instruments, strings and woodwinds so diverse and yet so harmonic. According to Patrick, the cantor sung, "Like a Disney Princess," which is a huge compliment in our household.

Before giving us our final blessing, the priest asked anyone who had a birthday that week to stand for a blessing. Mine was the Monday before, but I didn't think it counted. Then, he asked who was having an anniversary. Ours was the next day, so we stood and were blessed. Lastly, he asked the visitors to stand and blessed us as

the ushers handed out information cards and pocket-sized wooden crosses. I'm going to use mine as a Christmas ornament to honor our visit to this special place.



After Mass, I perused the small store set up in the vestibule, where they sold religious jewelry, music, DVDs, crucifixes, and cards of saints I'd never even heard of. People I'd never seen before stopped over to wish me a happy anniversary and welcome me to their parish. I found some things I liked in the store, then realized I only brought enough cash for the collection. Still, it was fun to window shop for Catholic gifts.

I consider my parish to be very welcoming, comfortable place for visitors, and I was elated to feel the same way at St. Ignatius Martyr. The whole experience was a reminder to me that the building itself is a very small part of what makes up a church.