

The Cravings of a Catholic Heart

The Catholic Review

The Catholic Review recently reported on the discovery over the summer of a time capsule on the site of a former independent living facility for elderly women at Roland Avenue and Coldspring Lane in North Baltimore known as Kirkleigh Villa.

The capsule was revealed during demolition of the building once known as “The Villa” and which closed in 1966 to make way for a new and larger facility that was opening in the Timonium section of Baltimore County.

The contents, as you may have read, likely didn’t inspire awe or amazement in anyone who observed them. In the copper box were some local newspapers, four 1925 coins and an American flag, as well as a couple of medals depicting Pope Pius XI and the Blessed Mother.

As often is the case with time capsules, items are selected that reflect the everyday life and spirit of the day so that people viewing them years into the future will do so with a better idea of what life was like and what was most important to those who lived then.

At the time of Kirkleigh Villa’s dedication in October of 1926, Archbishop Michael Curley eloquently stated, “The women who live here are not lacking in worldly goods, but they have felt in the past that they have lacked something which every human being wants and is entitled to—a real home. Here they will have companionship, an atmosphere of prayer, close relationship with God. These are the things which a Catholic heart craves. These are the things which all the wealth of the world can never make purchasable.”

Mother Seton’s Daughters of Charity, who operated the facility for its entire 40 years of existence, offered these gifts to the residents of Kirkleigh Villa, just as they do today in the hospitals and nursing homes they operate here in our Archdiocese.

As well, such care is still being provided at that new and larger facility which opened

the year Kirkeigh Villa closed. Though it took me a little more than two years, I recently accepted Sister Karen McNally's invitation to celebrate Mass there for the residents and patients of this magnificent facility, known as Stella Maris, which provides comprehensive health and housing services to the elderly, the sick and those approaching the end of their earthly lives.

I was not surprised to find, looking back at my visit and reflecting on Archbishop Curley's words, both the hunger of those present for spiritual nourishment, as well as the generosity of those whose job it is to provide it—evidenced so clearly by the robust attendance of both residents and employees at the 4pm Mass on a recent Thursday.

The Religious Sisters of Mercy and the pastoral team at Stella Maris, led by the residents' much-loved "pastor," Father Larry Johnson, are providing those in their care with the spiritual nourishment to satisfy the "cravings," Archbishop Curley noted which are present in the hearts of all Catholics and certainly of those I was privileged to meet during my visit.

Among those I met and who joined me in concelebrating the Mass were Fathers Edward Bayer, Robert Bozel, and George Buettner. I am most grateful for the witness they provide, in spite of their physical limitations, to those with whom they share a residence and a place at the Lord's table.

As well, I am grateful—as should be our local Church and, indeed, our entire community—to the many dedicated priests and religious communities of women and men serving in wonderful centers of healing and faith such as Stella Maris. One need only consider the countless lives impacted at the hospitals, nursing homes, and educational institutions where they have served and continue to do so, to appreciate the depth of their commitment to glorifying God through their service to others.