

Time to Time: Events lead up to Holy Week

Among the many ways of communicating the good news of the Gospel is radio. A radio Mass brings the Gospel into many homes in the Baltimore area every Sunday. On March 18 I had the privilege of celebrating a radio Mass and preaching at St. Ignatius Church. The pastor, Father James Casciotti, S.J., welcomed me to the special studio which is the weekly scene of the Mass.

The Gospel readings that day told the story of the Prodigal Son, although it really shows God as the Merciful Father, who forgives the failings of the son, embraces him, and has the fatted calf killed to celebrate his return.

That same evening Monsignor Joseph Luca, the pastor of St. Louis Parish, Clarksville, hosted me at a dinner in celebration of the Solemnity of St. Joseph. St. Louis has a new and magnificent church designed around the windows formerly in the Basilica of the Assumption, the nation's first Cathedral. I designated the windows for this parish because Charles Carroll of Carrollton, the only Catholic signer of the Declaration of Independence and the cousin of our first Bishop, John Carroll, had lived and died in the parish. His funeral took place from the Basilica.

The windows are shown to great advantage in the parish church, while the Basilica can now glory in the simple windows designed by Benjamin Henry Latrobe, the architect of the first U. S. Capitol.

Next morning, I offered Mass for our priests and seminarians, as is my custom on Mondays and Tuesdays. I give thanks to the Lord for the numbers of seminarians now entering our formation program, the highest since I was assigned to Baltimore in 1989. This year, please God, we shall have 14 new seminarians, including two from South America, who will join others preparing to serve the Spanish-speaking community in the Archdiocese. To meet the needs of the people, we now have Masses in Spanish in 19 parishes each Sunday.

Then, it was off to Washington, for a meeting of the Pro-Life Activities Committee of

the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. I looked forward to reporting to this committee a meeting with Michaelene Fredenburg, the president of a pro-life group from California, called Life Perspectives. They have had remarkable success in getting across a simple message about the harmfulness of abortion to the woman who experiences the procedure, not realizing how it will cause the death of another human being and harm her emotionally and spiritually.

Next day brought an ecumenical group to the Basilica, the Christian Church leaders of the area who meet on a bimonthly basis. This month they decided to meet at the Basilica so that they could see the recently restored building. Our tour of the building began with the Archbishop's House, not long ago described by a professor of American Church History at the Catholic University of America in Washington as the "most historic Catholic house in the United States." At the Basilica we could rejoice in the building flooded with light and enjoy the monuments to Pope John Paul II and Blessed Mother Teresa of Calcutta.

Then came a trip to Westminster, where the priests of Western Maryland, and some who were not able to go to an earlier meeting in Baltimore, gathered to be updated on what we are doing as an archdiocese to assure the protection of youth.

On March 24, I celebrated Mass at St. Augustine's parish, in suburban Elkridge. Father Jerry Bowen, the pastor, was on the spot immediately, explaining the new-to-me plaza in front of the church, an attractive place for the people to assemble. Diane Hodges, the Parish Secretary, and Dottie Neubauer, the Administrative Assistant, quickly appeared, and with gusto carried out their tasks.

The liturgy was beautiful and, at the end, Father Bowen presented me signs of the parish's concern for others: a gift to the Basilica in the amount of \$5,000 and a similar gift for the interfaith housing program established by Bishop P. Francis Murphy.

Among those serving the Mass were a brother and sister from Guatemala, who had been adopted by parishioners. The next day I saw them again at the Basilica.

The Basilica of the Assumption, on Sunday, March 24, was crowded in a marvelous way. The galleries were full in the rear of the church, and the St. Andrew's Society

of Baltimore was there in kilts and with bagpipes. This is the group made up of people of Scottish descent. Both Archbishop Borders and I have some Scot blood in our veins, as the St. Andrew's Society members remind me.

This week we are in Holy Week, begun with the procession of 1,000 of our young people through the streets of Baltimore. This week, we rejoiced in the largest numbers of youth since our pilgrimage began with World Youth Day in Denver, in 1993. At that time, I asked the youth whether they would take part in an event like that of Denver but back home in Baltimore.

Overwhelmingly, they said yes.

When I meet with media representatives, I sometimes ask them why they fail to report on this aspect of Church life which tells us that young people love their faith and will walk the extra mile to show it.

May you and your family be filled with the hope and promise of God's eternal love for us this blessed Easter Season.