

Seeing Jesus in a smile
Christmas Mass reveals Lord's presence in others
by KATIE MOORE

At Christmas we are reminded that Jesus is everywhere. We know that in the celebration of the Mass, Jesus is present in the Eucharist and that when we partake in holy Communion, Jesus becomes present in us.

The challenge in today's world, however, is opening our eyes to see Jesus in others.

This Christmas I was blessed with an invitation to the Holy Angel's Christmas Mass at Cardinal Gibbons Memorial Chapel at Sacred Heart Convent in Belmont Dec. 23.

Holy Angels provides a permanent home for children and adults with mental retardation and physical disabilities, many of whom are medically fragile.

The Mass is an annual event during which residents from Holy Angels participate in a Nativity re-enactment.

When I received the invitation to the Mass I knew it was going to be a touching experience. However, the joy I witnessed there was beyond anything I could have imagined.

I don't consider myself an overly-emotional person. But as I tried to convey my experience to my mother while standing in her kitchen on Christmas Eve, the flood gates opened and I started to cry.

I told her about the residents and their exuberant participation in the re-enactment through song, dance and theatrical performance.

And I told her of one resident Robert, who assisted as an altar server during the Mass.

For the nearly 20 years, Father Frank O'Rourke, pastor of St. Gabriel Church in Charlotte, has celebrated the Christmas Mass for Holy Angels. And for the past 15 years, Robert has been right by his side.

The look of pride on Robert's face as he assisted during the Mass was manifested in the form of a beaming smile.

Robert sat by Father O'Rourke during the Nativity re-enactment and as I glanced over at the pair, I caught Robert reaching out to shake Father's hand.

His esteem for Father O'Rourke was truly heartwarming.

During the sign of peace, I got to shake Robert's hand.

After that, I was the one who was beaming.

The next day, as I sat in a pew at St. Patrick Cathedral waiting for Christmas Eve Mass to begin, I read an Advent reflection by Bishop Robert Morneau. In it he said, "We are to be watchful as the Lord appears to us through the course of our ordinary lives."

I knew that I had been truly blessed because Jesus had revealed himself to me in such an obvious way — through Robert and his great big smile.

Jesus is not always easy to spot, but he is always there.

It is up to us to keep our eyes open.

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