

7/06/2024

I hope everyone is enjoying a 4th of July weekend however you wish to celebrate – festively, quietly, or with your toes in the sand! As for me, my nose will be in a book...a thick one called The Covenant of Water. I hope to finish it this weekend, but it is so enthralling that I know I will have a “book hangover” when I do.

Today, though, I want to take you way back a few days to last weekend, when I visited two parishes in the Eastern Vicariate.

The whirlwind began on Friday night at St. Jerome in Newport News where Bishop Knestout was there to dedicate its new worship space, adorned with a magnificent new altar handcrafted by artisans in the Philippines and shipped to America on a 65-day journey. For the past eight months, the parish had been celebrating Mass in the social hall, so the atmosphere was especially joyful to return to the new, improved, and stunningly beautiful sanctuary. There was also a tangible sense of pride among the community after coming together under Fr. George Prado’s leadership to raise over \$900,000 to make some essential repairs, such as the roof, plus commissioning the beautiful altar and its surroundings. My only regret is that I had not seen the “before” version of St. Jerome, but the “after” is something to behold.

A parish where I have experienced both the “before” and “after” is the Basilica of St. Mary of the Immaculate Conception in Norfolk. On Sunday, several of us made the trip to attend Mass and tour this historic parish, the oldest Catholic community in the Diocese. We were led by members of the parish’s Gate Keepers group and joined by the pastor, Fr. Jim Curran, who shared with us details of St. Mary’s rich past as well as details of the recent restoration completed in 2020. Suffice it to say, the splendidly rebuilt and renewed sanctuary we stood in on Sunday was the result of proverbial blood, sweat, and tears that gave Fr. Jim a 6-year headache. (Fortunately, he and the sanctuary both have recovered fully!) What began as a roof project estimated to cost several hundred thousand dollars ballooned to a crusade to save the entire structure from catastrophic termite and water damage, costing many times the original estimate to repair the roof. The building restoration is but the latest chapter in the fascinating story of this parish.

Of course, at both St. Jerome and St. Mary, like any of our parishes, the splendor of the sacred spaces is surpassed by the warmth, kindness, and faith of the people who worship in them throughout the year.

God Bless,

Margaret

P.S. You can see pictures of St. Jerome's renovations [here](#) and learn more about the history of St. Mary [here](#). Better still, if you get a chance, go visit each of these parishes. I know they will extend a warm welcome to you, just as they did to me!

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