The Cathedral of St. John the Baptist, Savannah, GA
June 2014
This year’s 40 Days for Life Campaign in Savannah was quite successful. On April 4th, about 60 people – including almost 20 children and 4 Clergy – gathered to pray and beseech God’s help in our mission. It was a precious hour of testimonies and inspiration. We were touched by the experience of a young woman who had procured an abortion at the 34th Street Clinic some years ago. Her testimony spoke of God’s healing grace in her life and the new purpose she had because of the work of the Holy Spirit. While we were praying during our Friday vigil, another young woman decided she would not go through with the abortion she had come to procure. We prayed with and for her.

After comments from several attendees at the Friday rally about growing in the conviction of the importance of protecting life, the 40 Days participants enjoyed the inspirational remarks of the priests and ministers who attended. Finally, all sang God’s praises in Spanish and in English.

The Vigil, which concluded on Palm Sunday, was attended and supported by prayer warriors of many churches around Chatham and surrounding counties (Bryan, Bulloch and Effingham) and at least one church in Bluffton, SC. Throughout the 40 Days many rosaries, Divine Mercy chaplets, various prayer intentions & songs of praise were offered up, especially with a crew of 15 who gathered together on the last hour of the last day, 6:00 PM April 13th.

Participants in the 40 Days are of many faiths, but all share a common mission, proclaiming the ancient teachings of the Christian faith, that all life is sacred because it is created by God, who is the Author of Life.

Every stage of life is precious; life cannot be left to the whim and will of the created, who are by nature sinful and prone to error.

The “New Beginnings” Rally was a final event for the Spring 2014, 40 Days for Life fasting and prayer campaign. Held during the 1st week of Easter, Friday, April 25th and concluded with a Jericho March (Joshua 6) around Savannah Medical Clinic, 120 E. 34th Street, we came together to proclaim the Risen Christ and ask for the protection of all human life.

Although this year’s 40 Day event has concluded, many participants have vowed to continue the effort to witness at the abortion facility on 34th Street. Perhaps, if more Christian people take up the challenge to become actively involved in the ministry of saving lives, in Savannah and around our country, one day there will be no further need for 40 Days for Life Campaigns. Until then, we are all called to take an active role in protecting the born and unborn, all of us created in God’s image.

We may never know all the good your sacrifices will bring about. It’s unexplainable, but there are abundant graces you will encounter once you pray on the sidewalk and even after leaving. Many thanks & may God richly bless you.
“Every Pentecost we contemplate and re-live in the liturgy the outpouring of the Holy Spirit sent by the risen Christ upon his Church; an event of grace which filled the Upper Room in Jerusalem and then spread throughout the world.”

— Pope Francis.

Pentecost has often been called the birthday of the Church. Just a little over a month before, the Apostles had betrayed and denied Jesus, then run off and hidden after his crucifixion. After Christ’s Ascension into Heaven, the Apostles knew that Jesus had promised to send His Spirit, but they didn’t know exactly what that would mean. Between Ascension Thursday and Pentecost Sunday, the Apostles and the Blessed Virgin Mary spent nine days in prayer, waiting for the fulfillment of Christ’s promise to send His Spirit.

The Acts of the Apostles recounts the story of the original Pentecost. Jews from all over were gathered in Jerusalem to celebrate the Jewish feast. On that Sunday, ten days after the Ascension of Our Lord, the Apostles and the Blessed Virgin Mary spent nine days in prayer, waiting for the fulfillment of Christ’s promise to send His Spirit.

“The Acts of the Apostles recounts the story of the original Pentecost. Jews from all over were gathered in Jerusalem to celebrate the Jewish feast. On that Sunday, ten days after the Ascension of Our Lord, the Apostles and the Blessed Virgin Mary were gathered in the Upper Room, where they had seen Christ after His Resurrection:

“And suddenly there came a sound from heaven, as of a mighty wind coming, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. And there appeared to them parted tongues as it were of fire, and it sat upon every one of them: And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and they began to speak with diverse tongues, according as the Holy Spirit gave them to speak.”

— Acts 2:2-4

In a Pentecost homily a few years ago, Pope Benedict XVI proclaimed, “On that first Pentecost morning, fifty days after Easter, a powerful wind blew over Jerusalem and the flame of the Holy Spirit descended on the gathered disciples. It came to rest upon the head of each of them and ignited in them a divine fire, a fire of love, capable of transforming things. Their fear disappeared, their hearts were filled with new strength, their tongues were loosened and they began to speak freely, in such a way that everyone could understand the news that Jesus Christ had died and was risen. On Pentecost, where there was division and incomprehension, unity and understanding were born.”

Christ had promised His Apostles that He would send His Holy Spirit and on Pentecost, they were granted the gifts of the Spirit. The Apostles began to preach the Gospel in all of the languages that the Jews who were gathered there spoke, and about 3,000 people were converted and baptized that day.

That is why Pentecost is often called “the birthday of the Church.” On this day, with the descent of the Holy Spirit, Christ’s mission is completed, and the New Covenant is inaugurated. Their encounter with the Holy Spirit in the Upper Room changed the Apostles. They were filled with the same Spirit which raised Jesus from the dead. The Holy Spirit enabled them to carry forward in time the ongoing mission of Jesus Christ until he returns to complete the work of redemption.

“The significance of Pentecost is that the Church, in union with Jesus, raises up a prayer to the Father, asking him to renew the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. May each of us, and every group and movement, in the harmony of the Church, cry out to the Father and implore this gift. Today too, as at her origins, the Church, in union with Mary, cries out: “Veni, Sancte Spiritus! Come Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful, and kindle in them the fire of your love! Amen.”

— Benedict XVI
The children in the Cathedral’s Children’s Religious Education (CRE) program continue to work diligently to understand the tenets of the Catholic Faith. A total of twenty-five children received three sacraments for the first time during the 2013/2014 school year. It takes years to prepare a child to receive Reconciliation and Eucharist for the first time as well as Confirmation for the first and only time. The preparations start at home immediately after Baptism. Our CRE program assists the family by instructing children in the Catholic faith while in kindergarten until they receive the sacrament of Confirmation. Our catechist, Julie Estvander teaches the kindergarten and 1st grade children their prayers as well as the basic fundamentals of the Catholic faith. These fundamentals are enhanced by Sherri Rachael and Shannon Lancaster who prepared students for Reconciliation and Eucharist. Sixteen children received these two sacraments for the first time this school year. While in 3rd, 4th, 5th, and 6th grades, the children strengthened their knowledge with the help of our catechists, Betsy Blalock and Amy Schuler. Catechist, William Gill starts the preparations for Confirmation in 7th grade with Confirmation usually occurring during 8th grade. Congratulations to the children who received their sacraments this year and to all the children in the CRE program for their diligence in trying to better understand their faith.

The following children received Reconciliation and Eucharist for the first time this year: Brogan Flannigan, Cecilia Flannigan, Zoe Green, Matthew Gullikson, Brigid Jones, Kelly Kullman, Aidan Rachael, Halle Schuler, Isabella Shull, Abigail Shuman, Kaden Velaquez, Cohen Wolfe, Noah Wolfe, Ryan Jaillette, Cassidy Jaillette, and Stephanie Aviles-Cintron. The following children received Confirmation this year: Zane Klug, Elizabeth Lehto, Stephen Lehto, David Macchi, Madeline Macchi, Jacob Parrish, Jaydon Parrish, Bryce Reynolds, and Caitlin Webber.
The preparations and the realization of the sacraments would not be possible without the support of the Cathedral’s Catholic community. We want to thank Bishop Hartmayer for conveying Confirmation on our worthy students. He grilled them gently although held them to the Faith Assessment worksheet. Special thanks also to Deacon Smith and Brother Robert for insuring that the ceremonies went smoothly, to Mac Fogle and Erin Love for providing wonderful music and to Ian Jones, Gus and Philip Morris for serving during Confirmation. Our heartfelt appreciation goes to the Catholic Council of Women for the wonderful and well received Confirmation reception. The food was delicious and the parish center never looked better. We also thank Jan Cunningham and Brenda Price for their support with the Program and Prayers of the Faithful. Additionally, we all want to especially thank our Rector, Father Schreck for conveying the sacraments of Reconciliation and Eucharist. He put our students at ease with his gentle nature and continual presence during the weekly CRE class sessions. We are truly blessed by the support received from our wonderful Rector and entire parish community.

At our final class session for the school year, the students presented a program celebrating the sacraments to many of their parents and family members. We processed into the parish center holding high the sacraments, presented the symbols of each sacrament and put the sacramental puzzle together to show Our Sacraments, Our Catholic Faith.

It was a wonderful faith formation year for over 70 students enrolled in our religious education program. Registration for next school year will take place in September. Keep up the great work of supporting the faith formation of God’s gift, our children.
Nearly exclusive to the Catholic Church, the Holy Rosary is one of the most cherished prayers and powerful devotions of the faithful, exemplified in the sacramental beads we use to offer its prayers.

The history of how we came to inherit the Rosary reinforces the sanctity of the devotion itself. As an aid to remember its origin, our Cathedral prominently displays a stained glass window, on the south side aisle, that portrays St. Dominic receiving a set of Rosary beads from the Blessed Virgin Mary and the Christ Child. It is not always easy to see when most of us attend Mass on Sunday morning because it is shaded by the extended south transept. But when fully illuminated by the afternoon sun, the window shows a star above the saint’s head and the lily resting against his shoulder identifying him as St. Dominic, Mary’s chosen conduit to deliver this powerful devotion to the faithful.

Historical records don’t explicitly claim that Mary delivered a set of physical rosary beads in the arrangement we have today. However, some evidence exists suggesting the structure and order of the Rosary, its 15 decades of Joyful, Sorrowful and Glorious mysteries were received by St. Dominic in the thirteenth century directly through a personal vision of the Blessed Virgin. It is possible that St. Dominic, after receiving the vision, constructed a unique arrangement of prayer beads. The use of beads was a familiar means for counting and reciting prayers for many centuries before St. Dominic. The specific design of rosary beads we have today, was developed to help the faithful pray the Rosary devotion to our Blessed Mother.

Historical context reveals just how important the Rosary was in Europe at that time. St. Dominic was a contemporary of St. Francis of Assisi who was commissioned by Jesus to “rebuild” His Church. This suggests St. Dominic lived during a period in need of revival. He encountered considerable challenges in his mission to proclaim the truth about God and the divine teachings.

Dangerous, and often violent heresies had taken root in France as well as other places that led to widespread apostasy. Despite his personal ascetics and his impassioned preaching, St. Dominic began to despair over his apparent inability to draw people back to the Church. According to tradition, the Blessed Virgin told him in a vision that prayer and meditation on the life of her Son was the remedy that would inspire piety and love in people, resulting in a return to orthodoxy.

St. Dominic knew it was not uncommon for some religious at that time to meditate on the 150 psalms as a method to focus on the life of Jesus. But since the majority of people in thirteenth-century Europe were illiterate, the psalms were not a universal solution to the apostasy of the time. Instead St. Dominic proposed substituting for the psalms a devotion that included 150 Hail Marys of the Rosary, making up the Joyful, Sorrowful and Glorious mysteries of Jesus’ and Mary’s life. (In 2002, our beloved late Holy Father, Saint John Paul II, added the Luminous mysteries.) In this way all people, despite their level of literacy had access to a powerful tool that would continually draw their focus to the life of Jesus and Mary.

The result was conversion for many and an increase of piety among the faithful.

Through the years, the rosary has assisted the faithful develop a deeper appreciation of these mysteries, unite our lives more closely to the Lord and implore His aid to live the faith. We also ask for the prayers of our Blessed Mother, the exemplar of faith, who leads all believers to her Son.
Two New Saints Watched Over Us
By Peter Paolucci

The recent canonizations of Pope John XXIII and Pope John Paul II marked a historic moment for the Catholic Church. Canonizing two recent popes in the presence of his immediate predecessor, Pope Francis praised the new Sts. John XXIII and John Paul II as men of courage and mercy, who responded to challenges of their time by modernizing the Catholic Church in fidelity to its ancient traditions.

"They were priests, bishops and popes of the 20th century," the pope said on April 27th, in his homily during Mass in St. Peter's Square. "They lived through the tragic events of that century, but they were not overwhelmed by them. For them, God was more powerful."

Francis went on to define John XXIII, who called the Second Vatican Council in the mid-1960s that launched the Church on a path of reform, as the “pope of openness to the Holy Spirit.” That’s a description that most devotees of “Good Pope John” would recognize and embrace.

For John Paul II, however, Francis referred to him the “pope of the family.” That may not be the first thing that would come to mind for most long-time observers of the Polish pope, who would more naturally see him as perhaps the “pope of freedom” for his struggles against Communism, or the “missionary pope” for his travels and his outreach to the world. But the Pontifical Council for the Family was founded on his watch, and his special enthusiasm for young people forms part of the fabric of the family.

The Coat of Arms of Saint John Paul II has been displayed on the wall of the north transept, just below the Ascension window, since the rededication of the Cathedral in 2000.

The coat of arms of Pope John Paul II is intended as an act of homage to the central mystery of Christianity, the Redemption. The main representation is a golden Marian Cross, on a blue shield, with a capital M for Mary inscribed in lower right hand corner, recalling the presence of Mary beneath the cross and her exceptional participation in the Redemption. The Holy Father had great devotion of to the Virgin Mary springing from the celebrated Marian shrine of Czestochowa, where the Polish people for centuries fostered their filial devotion to the Mother of God. Completing the design is the Papal tiara and keys of St. Peter.

Some of you might not be aware that the Coat of Arms of Saint John XXIII occupied that same place of honor from early 1960’s, when the Cathedral was last rededicated, until the completion of the most recent restoration in 2000.

Pope John XXIII choose for his papal coat of arms the family insignia of the Roncalli family flanked by two fleur-de-lis, along with the addition of the lion of St. Mark, the emblem of Venice, where Angelo Cardinal Guiseppe Roncalli, served as the Patriarch, before becoming Pope. The book held by the lion has the inscription, “Peace to you, Mark my evangelist.”

Here in the Cathedral of St. John the Baptist we particularly blessed to have had these new saints looking over us for more than 50 years.
During late March and early April I went to the North American College in Rome to study church art and architecture. There were twenty priests in my group. We spent a few hours in class each day followed by tours of various churches and ancient buildings around Rome.

Most of the early churches of Rome were built in the Romanesque architectural style. Romanesque structures are known by their massive scale, thick walls, round arches, large towers and decorative arcading. The dome is a defining feature of this type of architecture, essentially bringing heaven down to the people on earth. The oculus in the dome represents the eye of God watching over us.

Romanesque architecture eventually evolved into the Gothic style in the 12th century, like the Cathedral of St. John the Baptist. Characterized by very strong pointed arches and spires, a Gothic church is supposedly reaching towards God in heaven. These churches have large, stained glass windows to let in the beautiful colored light, which is an emanation from God.

One of the best-preserved of all the ancient Roman buildings is the Pantheon. Commissioned originally as a temple to all the gods of ancient Rome, the building is circular in design, with an entry portico of large granite Corinthian columns under a pediment. The rotunda, under a coffered concrete “dishlike” dome, has a central oculus open to the sky. The Pantheon’s dome is still the world’s largest unreinforced concrete dome.

The four “major basilicas,” of Rome, are accessible by bus or subway train or even walking and are worth a visit.

St. Peter’s Basilica is the one everyone knows because it’s the focal point of Vatican City. I had a lovely view of the Dome of St. Peter’s from my bedroom window. The world’s largest basilica of Christianity, built over the site of St. Peter’s tomb, is the main location for large Papal Masses. Tourists can pay to climb the winding stairs of the dome to get a view over Rome from the tippy top cupola. The plan of the elliptical dome of St. Peter’s belongs to Michelangelo who managed to finish only the portion of it before he died; it was completed after his death according to his drawings. The view of St. Peter’s Basilica from the square is unfortunately a bit disappointing. The enlargement of the church
by Pope Paul V, extending the imposing edifice into a true Latin cross floor plan, out into St. Peter’s square, partly obscures Michelangelo’s magnificent dome. The view of the dome is better from the other side.

St. Mary Major, unimpressive from the outside, is dedicated to the Virgin Mary. The original architecture of the basilica was classical and traditionally Roman perhaps to convey the idea that Santa Maria Maggiore represented old imperial Rome as well as its Christian future. It so closely resembles a second-century imperial basilica that it has sometimes been thought to have been adapted from a basilica for use as a Christian church. The first thing Pope Francis did, soon after his election, was to visit St. Mary Major and pray before the beloved and beautiful icon “Salus Populi Romani” or Salvation of the People of Rome.

Archbasilica of St. John Lateran is Christendom’s earliest basilica. Ordered by Rome’s first Christian Emperor, Constantine the Great, it became the Popes’ own cathedral and official residence for the first millennium of Christian history. St. John Lateran retains, internally its original Constantinian arrangement: a large rectangular hall with impressive nave, flanked by double aisles and terminating in an apse. Sound familiar. The basilica has provided the model for the great majority of Roman churches, from the earliest to most recent. It is the Cathedral church of the Diocese of Rome, and the Pope’s “cathedra” or throne is there. That’s why it gets the fancy title of “Archbasilica.” St. John Lateran is historically the home church of the Pope, not St. Peter’s as most would believe.

St. Paul’s Outside the Wall is my favorite basilica. Just as St. Peter’s was built over the burial spot of St. Peter, so St. Paul’s is over the burial location of St. Paul. This also explains why it takes a little longer to reach. It’s on the road to Ostia, accessible by subway line, or by number 23 bus from the center of Rome. Viewing the pyramid just outside the ancient wall en route to this basilica one can assume that that this is what St. Paul saw on his way to his death. The basilica is filled with portraits of every pope from Saint Peter to the current Pope Francis.

I had the wonderful opportunity to participate in a Penance Service with Pope Francis and to concelebrate all the Holy Week and Easter ceremonies with him. Our group also had an audience with the Holy Father.

I was photographed numerous times while walking around St. Peter’s Square while dressed in my monsignor robes. People thought I was on the Vatican Staff and wanted their picture taken with me.

I love Rome. There is so much ancient history there. Although I saw many beautiful churches on my trip, it was good to come home to the Cathedral of St. John the Baptist in Savannah. I like our cathedral here the best of all because I put so much of myself into it during its restoration. It may be smaller than the other great basilicas and cathedrals, but size is not the important thing. It’s what it means to you in your heart that counts. This one is just as beautiful as the others and this is my Cathedral.
Kelly Balmaceda, Cantor at the Cathedral for the past two years, has left Savannah and moved to Lafayette, Indiana, where her husband Armell, a helicopter pilot with the U.S. Coast Guard, will be pursuing his Masters in Aeronautical Engineering at Purdue University.

Most of you have been thrilled to hear her crystal clear and melodious voice leading the congregation in the hymns and responses every Sunday. And she recently gave an exceptional performance at the Stabat Mater concert on Palm Sunday. Kelly is a gifted and talented vocalist and the Cathedral parishioners have been blessed to hear her voice for the past two years.

When I interviewed her back in 2012, she said the Cathedral was majestic and the acoustics were incredible. Now, 2 years later, how did she feel after singing in that space for a couple of years. “It was a glorious space to make music. I really enjoyed singing and worshiping there. Performing with Mac and Jillian was just a wonderful experience. Leaving Savannah will be bittersweet. Naturally I will miss singing with the choir in the Cathedral, but after we move I plan to return to the pews and experience the liturgy with Armell and our son Christopher Miles for a couple of years.”

“I think the Cathedral Music Program, is doing great. We have a group of very talented section leaders which have helped to teach and encourage all of the choir members. Mac is choosing challenging and beautiful music and the choir is rising to the occasion. We have the voices and the number of participants is going up to the point that we are running out of choir robes. I hope it continues on this same path. The Cathedral is becoming a cultural center with a music program equal to the beauty of the building,” she concluded.

Just before she left, Kelly placed first in the State of Georgia and then the Southeast Regional competition the National Association of Teachers of Singing. She will be vying for the Highest Award at the National Competition in Boston, this July. We wish her well and are grateful that she shared her beautiful voice with us.

---

Over the past 116 years since the fire of 1898, the Cathedral has accumulated many chalices and ciboria. A ciborium is a chalice-like vessel used to contain the Blessed Sacrament. It has a round bowl and is provided with a conical cover surmounted by a cross. Usually made out of gold or silver, the interior of the cup is always lined with gold.

With the passage of time some of these sacred vessels have become seriously tarnished or lost their stones. They need to be refinished in order to preserve them and enable their continued use, in the celebration of the Eucharist.

Some parishioners have come forward and donated money for the restoration on the occasion of an anniversary or in memory of a loved one. The cost nominally runs between $300 and 500 dollars depending on the condition of the vessel.

If you have any interest in supporting the restoration of a chalice or ciborium please contact the parish office at 912-233-4709.

---

Restore a Sacred Vessel
Each year, Historic Savannah Foundation celebrates the best of preservation by presenting Preservation Awards to individuals, organizations and projects whose contributions demonstrate excellence in historic preservation. Awards are judged for the success they have achieved in the preservation, rehabilitation, restoration, and interpretation of our architectural and cultural heritage.

The Cathedral of Saint John the Baptist Spire Restoration was presented one of the Historic Preservation Awards at HSF’s 2014 Preservation Awards Luncheon, on April 30th in the Madison Ballroom at the DeSoto Hilton.

The award citation read...

“The Cathedral of St. John the Baptist, originally built in 1876 and reconstructed in 1898 after a fire, is one of Savannah’s most picturesque churches and also one of the most popular attractions in the City. As a result of new settlement and the effects of mid-Atlantic earthquakes in 2011 and 2012, Rives E. Worrell Company was hired to perform structural improvements and restore the historic Cathedral. Earthquake damage to the 100+ year old building included extensive cracking of the brick, terra cotta and exterior stucco. Damage was particularly acute on the two large spires. Forensic investigations found widespread damage to the underlying brick columns, as well as many areas where stucco and terra cotta were loose and posed a risk to the public.

What was originally intended to be a 3-4 month project quickly became a much longer one due to these unforeseen conditions and the $1.7 million project, which began in January 2013 and was finally completed in October. The restoration included removal of exterior layers of stucco and terra cotta, placement of structural steel reinforcements and incorporation of carbon fiber mesh to stabilize the brick. Where possible, sections of terra cotta were reused, but many areas had to be replaced. The signature Rose Window also required significant repair and restoration. Weep boles which allow windows such as these to “breathe,” were never added to the original rose window so over time, through condensation and age, water was trapped inside and started to rot the wood and leak into the interior. The entire window had to be deconstructed piece-by-piece, all of the glass was removed and cleaned, the rotten wood repaired and weep boles were added to each section of the window upon reinstallation. Remarkably, the Church was kept open, accessible, and fully functional throughout the entire project, offering two masses and accommodating hundreds of visiting tourists a day."

According to Daniel Carey, president of Historic Savannah Foundation, “HSF is pleased to recognize the Cathedral of St. John the Baptist with this Preservation Award. The Diocese has demonstrated a strong commitment to good stewardship and the long-term preservation of this iconic landmark in the City of Savannah.”

Walter B. Murphy III of Rives E. Worrell Company, who accepted the award at the luncheon commented, “The firm is proud to have been part of preserving this historically significant building in the Savannah community, and helping it continue to provide church members with a beautiful place of worship, while creating a lasting monument for all to enjoy. The impact to this community is great for all who live, work and play in Historic Savannah.”

All Cathedral parishioners, who have a deeply felt love our beautiful and historic church, are strongly committed to preserving this glorious setting to worship God, as a symbol of our faith for future generations.
The 8th in the series of Cathedral ornaments, which feature our beautiful stained glass windows, has arrived. The 2014 edition is a representation of the Mary Magdalene Window. It is available for a donation of $20 at the reception desk in the rear of the church, the rectory or at: savannahcathedral.org, click on gift items.

Some 2013 ornaments, “Christ with the Children,” are still available. If you are missing a particular year in your collection, they are on back order. Watch the bulletin for their availability.