Sacraments Continue Amid COVID-19

By Janee Przybyl, CRE Director

In spite of a worldwide pandemic, the Cathedral Basilica’s Children’s Religious Education (CRE) program held Confirmation and 1st Eucharist for 26 students, 13 during each sacramental celebration. It was a wonderful and meaningful opportunity for these children and their families to witness and experience a strengthening of our Catholic faith.

Confirmation took place on the evening of Sunday, May 31st which was the Feast of Pentecost. Bishop Emeritus J. Kevin Boland conveyed the sacrament in front of a small assembly of sponsors, friends and family members. The Bishop stressed the importance for each newly confirmed Catholic to go forward and use the gifts of the Holy Spirit to spread their faith throughout their lifetime. The students and everyone in attendance renewed their baptismal vows and pledged to stay true to the teachings of the Catholic faith. Although we did not have the traditional celebratory dinner afterwards, the newly confirmed were encouraged to celebrate as a family to recognize their sacramental accomplishments.

First Communion took place on Sunday, June 14th during the 10:00 Sunday morning mass which was the Feast of Corpus Christi. Father Schreck conveyed the sacrament for the first time to thirteen 2nd graders. Prior to receiving the Eucharist, each child stated that they believe this is the Body of Christ by using the word Amen. During the homily Father Schreck reminded everyone in attendance that the Body of Christ is not a symbol of our Catholic faith but God’s gift of his body as nourishment during our journey on earth and on our journey to heaven. The children paid close attention while receiving the Eucharist for the first time and we pray that they will continue to receive the Body of Christ throughout their lives.

These sacraments could not have been conveyed without parish wide support and commitment. First of all, I would like to thank and recognize the parents for getting their children ready to receive their respective sacraments. This pandemic was a challenge for many including our CRE parents and students. In addition to being their child’s homeschool teacher and working full time for many, they guided their children through the
process of writing letters to Bishop Boland and Father Schreck and taking an emailed test to show their understanding of the sacrament they were about to receive. Secondly, I would like to thank our sacramental preparation catechists for their diligence in sending out assignments for the students, preparing a knowledge assessment test, corresponding with the parents and for the 2nd graders handing out their textbooks during drive by visits to the Cathedral Basilica. These wonderful catechists were Mrs. Kristin Ensley for the Confirmation class and Mrs. Holli Burgess for the first Eucharist class. The Holy Spirit provided us with the perfect catechists during this imperfect time in our history. Thank you.

Additionally, I would like to thank all the catechists not previously mentioned that helped make our CRE school year a success: Julie Estvander, Shannon Lancaster, Alizon McLaughlin, Christine Wacta, Alexa Frame, Jamie Joselyn, Sarah Runto and David Josselyn. You are a great team of faith formation specialists. Although our year was cut short you made a great impact on the faith formation of many children from our Cathedral Basilica. Thank you.

Also, I would like to thank Bishop Boland, Father Schreck, the Parish Council, Dr. Paul Thornock, Jan and Brenda, our parish administrators and all those praying for the accomplishments of our CRE program, especially Barbara who prays daily for our success. We couldn’t do what we do without your support, kindness and encouragement.

I am not sure at this writing what our CRE program will look like in the fall. I will communicate through the bulletin as to when registration will take place and how we will pass on our faith during our next CRE school year.

God bless you all and keep talking to your children about our Catholic faith on a daily basis.
It is extremely common to walk into a Catholic church and see the letters IHS etched on a crucifix or prominently featured in a stained glass window.

At the Cathedral Basilica of St. John the Baptist this symbol is visible many times both inside and if you are very observant outside the church. Perhaps you do not know the meaning of these letters even though they are directly in front of us in the brass entry gates to the Blessed Mother’s and Sacred Heart Chapels.

They are also prominently displayed in the center of the old high altar just below the crucifix. And if you are very observant, you may have noticed it depicted in the apex above the entrance to the Rectory.

During researching for this article I came across this interesting tidbit...George Eliot’s novel Silas Marner contains a scene in which a townswoman named Dolly Winthrop brings Silas some lard cakes with the letters IHS baked into the top of each one. Neither Dolly nor Silas knows what the letters mean. Dolly simply puts IHS on her baked goods because she sees the letters in her church every Sunday and assumes there is some benefit to them. Her explanation is rather droll: “They’re good letters, else they wouldn’t be in the church.”

So what do these “good letters” mean? The IHS is a monogram symbolizing Jesus Christ. In Greek, it is an abbreviation of the name ἸΗΣΟΥΣ (Jesus). Dating back to the third century, Christians shortened the name of Jesus by writing only the first three letters of his name in Greek, ΙΗΣ (from his full name ΙΗΣΟΥΣ). The Greek letter Σ (sigma), is written in the Latin alphabet as an “S.” This results in the monogram being commonly represented as IHS.

In the early centuries it was a secret symbol, often etched on tombs of Christians. Then in the 15th century, Saint Bernardino of Siena went on a preaching campaign to promote reverence to the Holy Name of Jesus. He encouraged Christians to put IHS on the doorways of their homes.

The IHS symbol now permeates Christian art all over the world.
In 1950 he returned to Rome and on July 12th, Bishop O’Hara received the personal title of archbishop as an indication of Pope plus XII’s gratitude for all his courageous work in Romania.

Upon his return to the United States, Archbishop O’Hara was greeted enthusiastically by both his Savannah and Atlanta congregations and newspaper editors praised him for his fearlessness behind the “Iron Curtain.”

Archbishop O’Hara was named apostolic nuncio to Ireland in 1951 and in 1954 apostolic delegate to Great Britain.

He passed away in London on July 16, 1963. His body was returned to the United States and is interred in the crypt of the Cathedral Basilica of Saints Peter and Paul in Philadelphia, from whence he came.
What does the symbol IHS mean? Find out on page 9.