

## **View From the Pew**

*by Meredith Mackin Rilley*

*Jesus exalted his disciples to go and tell the “good news”. There is a good news story to be shared from the pews of St. Edward’s. We hope you will enjoy the news and join us in prayer. — Msgr. Martin Ryan*

### **Pope Benedict XVI Message Reaches the Hearts of St. Edward Parishioners.**

Not a half-hour before the lottery for tickets to the Pope’s Mass at Yankee Stadium were to be drawn, Heidi Flaherty called the office at St. Edward’s church. “Is it too late?” Originally, she hadn’t put in her name, because she was unsure whether her husband, whose spirituality is far more private than her own, would want to go as much as she did. But, on the day of the drawing, she changed her mind and called the office. “If you want your name in, you’d better come down now. The drawing is in a half hour!”

Each of the 87 parishes in the Diocese of Bridgeport was given 10 tickets to the Papal Mass and St. Edward’s allotted all of those for parishioners and not clergy. Msgr. Ryan explained the reason for holding a lottery. “It was important to distribute the tickets so they were accessible to all in the parish.” Because of the pastoral needs of the parish, he and Fr. Joe Cervero were unable to attend either of the Masses available to them, including the Yankee Stadium Mass and the Mass at St. Patrick’s Cathedral in New York City, which was intended for clergy. This enabled all 10 tickets to be put into the lottery, helping people like Heidi be among the chosen few who made it to the Bronx.

Not knowing much about Pope Benedict XVI and his message previous to the Mass, Heidi based her need to attend out of her love for the St. Edward’s community. “I’ve never been in a church before where there are so many faith-filled women in the same cycle of life — with young families. It made me feel special to be chosen [from among them]. What was also special was being in the presence of 57,000 people all praying together. At a time when praying in public is often frowned upon, I felt comforted to pray publicly with so many. It was so joy-filled and inspiring.”

One of the Pope’s strongest messages is that each of us is a result of a thought of God. Each of us is willed, each of us is loved, each of us is necessary. This sentiment spoke loudly to Heidi “Hearing his desire to value life at all ages — the unborn, the teen, the adult, and all cultures — [proves his] value of life and value of each other. Being in his presence was grace-filled. Just seeing him touched me. His message encouraged me to stay on the right path and confirmed that I’m headed in the right direction.”

Suzanne McGuire, another lottery winner, agrees that what was so striking about the crowd was “the commonality of all the people gathered in one place to share Mass, [despite the fact that] we were all very different.” She recognized that attending a Mass said by the Pope would be a once in a lifetime experience. “I knew I would never have another opportunity. It was worth a try.”

Suzanne was familiar with the Pope’s message of hope before attending the Mass and felt

it deeply in his sermon, along with messages of peace and love. Another point with which she left the Mass was about seeing Christ in each other and being Christ for each other. “I hadn’t done this as much before. Being a Mom, sister and daughter is Christ like, but seeing how much we all have in common made me want to strive further for that goal.” In fact, Suzanne is presently back in school changing careers from accounting to nursing — no easy feat for a single mom — and proving that she truly does want to care for others more and be Christ for others. “The Mass and the Pope’s point validated my decision to make this huge change in my life. Now I see Christ in patients, families, nurses and other healthcare providers. I keep it in the forefront of my mind that Jesus is right here, right now. He is everywhere, in every situation.”

“I haven’t been in many churches,” said another ticket holder, Marion Fuchsenthaler, a very active senior member of St. Edward’s parish. “But St. Edward’s is a family church — they’re concerned about each other.” In addition to attending daily Mass, Marion is the President of the Lady’s Guild, a Eucharistic Minister and a Sacristan for St. Edward’s Church. Despite this involvement in the Catholic Church, she had little prior knowledge of this Pope’s message, but came away from the Mass at Yankee Stadium with insight. “[I heard the Pope speak of] love of God and neighbor and forgiveness. His upbringing in Bavaria formed his faith and since we’re both German I found it easy to relate to his philosophies.”

Marion wanted to go to the Yankee Stadium Mass, because she also felt that common thread that others who attended felt. “Being in the presence of the Vicar of Christ on earth is a privilege. It was beautiful to see all ethnic groups together. When I saw this beautiful set-up, heard the bells ring, and saw all the clergy come celebrate with the Pope it made my heart feel happy.” Marion wants to help St. Edward’s continue to bring the Pope’s message to the parish. “After the Pope’s Mass, I feel I have a greater intimacy with Jesus Christ — I’m closer than before. I hope this helps me to serve St. Edward’s with more joy and purpose.”

There’s a stadium’s worth of difference between Mass at St. Edward’s and Mass at Yankee Stadium by the Pope, but the heart of the matter is the same. As Heidi put it, “They’re both very spiritual. Mass with the Pope at Yankee Stadium is so grand, with all the entertainment and the pomp and circumstance and Mass at St. Edward’s is like going home.” Home is a common sentiment amongst the Mass attendees. Suzanne McGuire said, “After twelve years at St. Edward’s, it feels like home. It’s such a family parish. St. Edward’s is a place to grow closer to God.” And, having had the good fortune to hear the Pope say Mass, his message of hope stayed with Suzanne. The message reinforced her belief that one of the many parallels between a “home” Mass and a Papal Mass, is the fact that St. Edward’s is meeting the Pope’s message by reaching out with its many programs and activities. “Reaching out is hope.”

### **New Fairfield Teens Chosen to Attend Papal Youth Rally**

Adults weren’t the only lucky ones to enjoy an audience with the Pope. The Youth Rally at the St. Joseph’s Seminary in Yonkers, NY saw six of St. Edwards’ high school teens amidst the throngs of other teens on the lawn on that beautiful hot day in April. The teens

chosen are from St. Edward's Senior Youth Group. "These kids are are such good kids," said Katheryn LaRegina, who was one of the three chaperones on the trip to St. Joseph's. "They truly reflect God's love."

Like the adults who attended the Yankee Stadium event, the kids agreed that being chosen to go to the rally made them feel special. They also agreed that being in the Pope's presence was a once in a lifetime event. "Everyone I told [about going to the Mass] said they wished they were in my place," said Patrick McCormick, who even gave up a lacrosse game to go to the rally.

Having their whole lives ahead of them gave the teens a different perspective from the adults on the Pope and, fittingly, the Pope chose topics that addressed their generation. Adriana Zegarelli acknowledged this. "He tried to direct the Mass to teenagers and spoke of his childhood. [I'm told] it was the first time he has spoken of this."

The Pope's talk of his childhood also made an impression on Sean Callahan, who mentioned that the Pope grew up in Nazi Germany. He spoke to the Pope's beliefs that emanated from this dark time. "He said that he never stopped believing in God and that we should treat people the way we want to be treated." Sean concurred that this validated his belief in the same concept. Continuing Sean's thoughts, Patrick said, "He told stories of World War II and told us that he didn't follow [the Nazi beliefs] even though people were being persecuted [for not following]. He showed us that you don't have to follow and give in — you can make your own opinion. Don't just do things without thinking. Hearing the Pope say this helped me to believe it more." In relating this to her own life, Lizzie LaRegina commented, "I liked how he talked about not believing in what was going on then. With us and peer pressure to drink and even things like going to practice every day and schoolwork, which we don't always want to do, we should persevere through hard times and not give in."

In drawing their own parallels between St. Edward's Masses and their experience with the Pope's homily, the teens recognized the same message coming from their own parish. "St. Edward's likes to give real life instances [at Mass], so we can relate. [They make everything] easy to understand. The Pope did the same thing," Vinny LaRegina remembered. Marni Cutler added, "I got the impression that he really understood [the American] kids' experience."

All of the teens who went to the rally go to Work Camp, where they volunteer manual labor around the area, raising money for a week long work camp experience. Adriana talked about how helping others shows her faith. She specifically spoke of helping to bring Catholics home to the Church. "Manual help is spiritual. People see that the Church is reaching out. If someone is away from the Church and is helped by kids taking time out of their summer to help, it might make them see the Church in a better light."

Patrick talked about how he will lead his life a bit differently after this experience. "In general, I won't follow what other people do. I'll try to set an example." Marni agreed that she has been reaching out more. "I've been talking to people who I wouldn't have [talked to] before. If they're upset about something, I'll help them now."

The rally itself, 25,000 teenagers strong, was not the chaotic event one might associate with that number of youths in one place. In fact, it was the exact opposite: peaceful and loving. The young people wore t-shirts saying, "We Love Our German Shepherd" and shouted out "I love you!" to the Pope, to which he responded, "I love you, too!" He didn't just reach out emotionally to the kids, but also physically, letting them hug him and kiss him on the cheek. This love was something taken to heart by both the teens and adults who were in the Pope's company, hearing him speak. It is an opinion Vinny LaRegina addressed. "He said that you should always have God in your life and always see the brighter side of things."

Truly, the outpouring of love to and from the Pope during his visit to the United States was an ideal illustration of God's presence in our lives. His example, as much as his words, hit the message out of the park.