

Encountering the sacred amidst the profane

By Anthony Maranise, ObISB

My flight touched-down at Louis Armstrong Airport just before noon on Good Friday. The irony is not lost that at noon (the oft-attributed time of the Lord's Crucifixion) I would be "searching" for something: either in baggage-claim or for my brother in the endless sea of cars there to pick-up passengers. When we search for any item or any answer, it necessarily indicates a sort of lacking; dare I say, a "lostness" of sorts. Our Blessed Mother, the Apostles, the other followers of Jesus, at the moment they saw Him raised upon that Cross, must have felt this "lostness" as they searched for an answer as to why this was happening.

Apart from returning to New Orleans to celebrate Easter with my brother, I also would be running on Holy Saturday morning in the Crescent City Classic, so I had packet pick-up and other preparations to attend to that afternoon. As one does in the pursuit of crossing items off a "to-do list" as well as the excitement that came with my return, I had lost track of time. It was now well after three, and I had not yet prayed the Stations of the Cross to recall the time of the Lord's passing.

My brother and I, having run into some friends at the packet pick-up, found ourselves having a light bite (since we were fasting, after all) at Bacchanal. Struck with what I have told him several times now was a "moment of Divine inspiration," he suggested to me that we simply walk across the

way there and pray the Stations of the Cross on our own along the riverfront. No sooner had he suggested this did I recall the words of the popular Jesuit priest and author, Fr. James Martin, who in his book, *The Jesuit Guide to Almost Everything*, advises readers in the spirit of St. Ignatius Loyola to "find God in everything." So we would. On this Good Friday, we decided to walk the riverfront from the junction of Chartres and the Pauline Street Wharf in the Bywater through the Marigny, kneeling at points along the way, and reciting St. Alphonsus Liguori's Stations, ending at the statue of St. Joan of Arc in the French Market.

Though not in any specific church, and without any sculpted depictions to gaze at, and certainly somewhat in unorthodox fashion, we offered these Stations up in union with the Passion of the Lord, for the intentions of the Church and the world. As we traveled, we both would casually comment to one another how unique, spontaneous, yet still how "powerful" the entire experience felt. I think that was the point: To search for and to discover God in the midst of life. The profane (or ordinary) streets, sights, sounds, and smells of New Orleans became sacred (or extraordinary), in those moments of contemplation and action. St. Irenaeus of Lyon said, "The glory of God is humanity fully alive; moreover, life itself is the vision of God."

I reflected on each station and its meditation in order in my

mind as we prayed them, but in my heart, I began to associate the various sights of life around me with these popularly depicted 'visions of God' in the Way of the Cross. So, as we passed the sleeping homeless person on a bench in Crescent Park, I did not simply see this, but instead, Jesus fall for the first, the second, and the third time because it was clear that this man had "fallen" on some hard times.

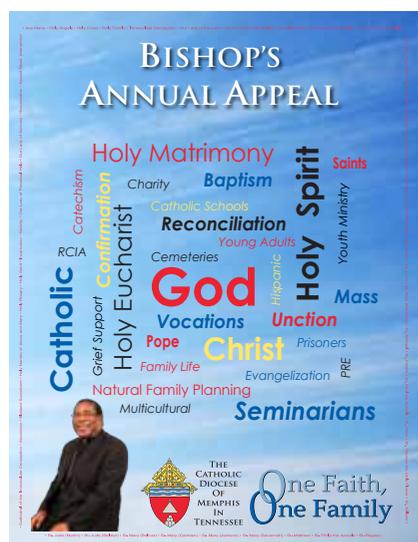
When we saw a group of young ladies taking a group 'selfie' with the now infamous Rice Mill Lofts with the "You are beautiful" graffiti in the background, I envisioned Jesus meeting the women of Jerusalem and telling them not to cry because by His sacrifice, He would, indeed, make them all beautiful, no matter their sins. Passing a lumber yard, I remembered those words of that evening's Passion Service and the Twelfth Station: "Behold, the wood of the Cross on which hung the Savior of the World."

Finally having arrived in the French Market at the monument to St. Joan of Arc, we knelt a final time for that particular recitation of the Stations. Though normally, there are 14 Stations that omit The Resurrection, our stations hadn't exactly been your traditional Stations, so we offered a meditation and reflection on both the miracle and the mystery that we would soon celebrate. Once again, the irony of situations in which I found myself that day was not lost. St. Joan is credited with having said, "Act and God



will act." Though those Stations were certainly different than I was used to, God still found me and moved me. But, we mustn't be inactive in our "search" for God. We must seek to "find Him in everything" which includes in the midst of life ... and be certain that He is here with us because He has Risen as He promised! Happy Easter to all.

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