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Go Make Disciples

Eucharistic pilgrims: 'Advancing steps, advancing the kingdom'

Archbishop Coakley led a Eucharistic Procession on June 1 from Christ the King Catholic Church to St. Eugene Catholic Church in Oklahoma City.

Photo Chris Porter/Sooner Catholic.



By Emma Bowman
The Sooner Catholic

Cate Whitmarsh, still taking in a special day, reflected on the awe of her proximity to Jesus.

"I was able to walk probably three feet from Christ for over an hour," Whitmarsh said. "It's incredible to think about that after the fact."

"It felt like we were walking together, hand-in-hand, like best friends."

Whitmarsh, a parishioner and altar server at Christ the King Catholic Church, walked among

hundreds as one of two thurifers – liturgical ministers who swing the thurible carrying burning incense – during an Oklahoma City Eucharistic Procession from Christ the King to Saint Eugene parishes, part of the National Eucharistic Pilgrimage making its way from Indianapolis to Los Angeles.

The pilgrimage, led by a team including eight perpetual pilgrims, spent five days in Oklahoma, including parts of four days in the Oklahoma City metro area, as part

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'I'm looking forward to being an instrument of God's mercy'

By Diane Clay
The Sooner Catholic

Before Deacon John Grim was born, his parents prayed that God would bring them a son who was called to be a priest. On June 28, God willing, their prayers will be answered.

That's when their son is scheduled to be ordained a priest for the Archdiocese of Oklahoma City at The Cathedral of Our Lady of Perpetual Help. The ordination is open to the public and will be broadcast on the archdiocesan website and the cathedral's YouTube page.

"Early on Jim and I prayed that, if it was God's will, we would have a son who would become a priest," Ann Grim said. "We have four children and, naturally, want each one to follow what God is calling them to in their lives."

"It is evident to me that the Holy Spirit has brought John to this moment in his life. I have many times marveled and pondered that movement of the Holy Spirit as I watched him grow and mature. We truly believe he has been called to the priesthood, and we are filled with joy!"

Grim, 29, was accepted into the



John Grim baptized his niece at St. Benedict Catholic Church. Her parents are Elizabeth Nunes, John's sister, and David Nunes. *Photo provided.*

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The closing celebration of the National Eucharistic Pilgrimage in the Archdiocese of Oklahoma City began with a Eucharistic Procession on June 3 at the Bl. Stanley Rother Shrine in Oklahoma City. Photos Chris Porter/Sooner Catholic.



The National Eucharistic Pilgrimage handoff from the Diocese of Tulsa to the Archdiocese of Oklahoma City was held May 31 at St. Gregory's Abbey in Shawnee. Photo Theresa Bragg/ St. Gregory's Abbey.



Pilgrims traveling with the National Eucharistic Pilgrimage visited Sister BJ's Pantry on June 1. Photo provided.



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of the Saint Katharine Drexel Route, featuring several events celebrating the Eucharist. Beginning in Indianapolis on May 18, the perpetual pilgrims are journeying through America's streets until Corpus Christi Sunday, celebrated this year on June 22.

Stops included Saint Gregory's Abbey, where a handoff ceremony from the Diocese of Tulsa to the Archdiocese of Oklahoma City took place; a holy hour at Saint Joseph Catholic Church in Norman; the procession between the two parishes in Oklahoma City; a SUMMIT event with adoration, confessions and music at The Cathedral of Our Lady of Perpetual Help; and finally a Eucharistic Procession and Mass at the Blessed Stanley Rother Shrine.

For Arthur "Ace" Acuna, one of the perpetual pilgrims, the time at the shrine was enlightening.

"This has been amazing," he said. "I had never heard of Blessed Stanley, now I have a devotion to him."

Fittingly, on June 1 – the first day of the month dedicated to the Sacred Heart of Jesus – many faithful of Oklahoma City and beyond gathered at Christ the King to participate in the procession to Saint Eugene. While temperatures and humidity soared, a stout turnout arrived to walk joyfully with the Eucharistic Lord, fending off the heat ... and more.

"It was scorching hot that day, and I was only in a cassock and surplice with one layer underneath," Whitmarsh said. "I can't imagine what it must have been like for some of the priests – or even Archbishop Coakley – in full vestments."

Still, there was added enthusiasm among participants after a couple years with rained-out events.

"We're finally rain-free!" several exclaimed.

Inside Christ the King, attendees gathered for a Liturgy of the Word before beginning the procession. Then, with rosaries in hand and prayers on their lips, they followed the Blessed Sacrament onto the street toward Saint Eugene.

However, as they exited the church, the peaceful procession encountered hostile opposition. An anti-Catholic group armed with megaphones hurled blasphemous language and insults at the participants, including the priests and Archbishop Coakley. What initially seemed like a brief disturbance soon became a persistent presence, as the group followed the entire

procession route.

Despite the heckling – targeting beliefs such as the Real Presence in the Eucharist, Marian devotion, and the priesthood – the pilgrims remained steadfast in faith.

"It was shocking, jarring and upsetting," Whitmarsh said. "I couldn't believe what they were saying, all those horrible things. And yet, it acted as a kind of wake-up call for me."

"Their words were meant to discourage, but they actually encouraged me. I know that my Catholic faith is true and beautiful."

Throughout the walk, pilgrims continued to sing hymns and recite prayers, largely unfazed by the noise.

"I remember hearing Archbishop Coakley start saying Hail Marys behind me," said Whitmarsh. "I couldn't help but join in. Eventually, all of us – servers, priests and laypeople – were praying Hail Marys together."

"I think we drowned out the megaphones for a while. It brought peace in the midst of a storm."

As the procession neared its end and the dome of Saint Eugene came into view, cheers erupted. Several priests ran ahead to greet the pilgrims with holy water. With the protestors no longer in pursuit, Father Jerome Krug lightheartedly said while sprinkling a family, "Let's wash all that stuff off you."

After Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament inside the church, Archbishop Coakley addressed the day's challenges.

"One thing repeatedly came to mind today: 'Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do,'" he said. "Today was perhaps the proudest day of my priesthood. Thank you for being here."

Whitmarsh said she was especially moved by the archbishop's composure throughout the ordeal.

"He didn't want to trade places with Father Zak Boazman when it came to carrying our Lord," she recalled. "In fact, he said, 'As long as (the protestor's) talking, I'm not going to stop walking.'"

Whitmarsh noted how public witness to Christ invites opposition, yet but also bears great fruit.

"I'm so grateful to Archbishop Coakley and everyone who organized the procession," she said. "Everyone stayed composed and prayerful. We were advancing in steps, certainly, but I truly experienced the advancement of the Kingdom."

Emma Bowman is a freelance writer for the Sooner Catholic.