Voices of Sisters

Spirituality

Felican Sisters of North America are pictured with Auxiliary Bishop Bruce Lewandowski of Baltimore at the National Eucharistic Congress in Indianapolis. From left: Sr. Melanie Marie Bajorek; Sr. Bernadette Kapfer; Sr. Grace Marie Del Priore; Lewandowski; Sr. Mary Francis Lewandowski; and Sr. Jane Mary Gawlik. (Courtesy of Grace Marie del Priore)

by Sr. Grace Marie Del Priore

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Some 50,000 Catholics and their friends came from near and far to the National Eucharistic Congress in Indianapolis, Indiana from July 17-21. When I heard about this event, I knew I wanted to go. It was an opportunity to connect to the universal church, to be an active, engaged member of the larger church that is mother to all Catholics. It was a blessing to be a part of the larger church community! There were so many sisters there, and I experienced a global sisterhood in diversity of the church reflected in different languages, rites and the places they call home.

The events of the congress took place in Lucas Oil Stadium, the Indiana Convention Center and surrounding buildings. Nearby St. John the Evangelist Church served as the perpetual adoration chapel for the weekend. It was often so packed with adorers that it was standing room only!

The congress was a revival and an ongoing movement. I came to the congress with a desire to be inspired and impassioned. I've been shifting gears, getting ready for changes in my life, and feeling like I'm in-between. This revival brought with it the presence of the Holy Spirit, which filled me in ways I still don't completely understand.

The special intercessor of the eucharistic revival was Blessed Carlo Acutis, an Italian website designer whose devotion to the Eucharist inspired him to document eucharistic miracles using his computer skills. I knew very little about him going into the congress and was inspired by what I learned, too.

Four groups walked to Indianapolis on pilgrimage from the four corners of the United States. At the beginning of the first night, each group presented a framed picture of the patron saint of the area they came from. Those pictures were placed in the middle of the stadium floor level for the congress.

Each evening, the entire group gathered for the revival sessions, a combination of adoration, speakers and music that inspired and challenged them. Adoration was a critical part of the Congress. There was exposition of the Blessed Sacrament each

evening. The eucharistic congress started with exposition, included a procession, and concluded with the Eucharist at the closing Mass.

A common theme for the congress was the road to Emmaus. Several speakers encouraged the pilgrims to see Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament with eyes of faith and with their hearts. When that crowd of people adored in silence before the Blessed Sacrament, there was unity, not just of belief but also of love.

A variety of Masses were available daily at different times and in a variety of languages and rites. When we prayed together at Mass, we lifted up our hearts to the Lord together, and prayed for the world together. The longer, bigger Masses were beautiful. There were so many priests there, it was impressive. The music was incredible, they had lovely songs sung by choirs or professional musicians.

The act of receiving Communion with so many other people and pausing to pray and reflect together was unifying and moving. The chalices and monstrance used at the congress were blessed by Pope Francis. He extended his blessing other ways, too. The papal nuncio to America spoke the first night and the cardinal who presided over the closing Mass read a letter from Pope Francis.

Sr. Grace Marie Del Priore of the Felican Sisters of North America is pictured with Heather Deneen at the National Eucharistic Congress in Indianapolis. (Courtesy of Grace Marie del Priore)

One recurring theme of the congregation was repentance. Several speakers quoted from the second chapter of Revelation: "I know your works, your toil and your patient endurance. I know that you cannot tolerate evildoers. ... But I have this against you, that you have abandoned the love you had at first."

The people were exhorted to revive their hearts from apathy, since repentance is the road to love. It's not possible to turn to God fully or to give wholeheartedly without it. Many people took advantage of the opportunity to receive the sacrament of reconciliation there. I also responded to the call to repentance, realizing that any distance or lukewarmness I have from God is my own.

I reflected upon the obstacles I was putting up between me and God and what I could do about it. I think my need to be independent keeps me from experiencing my need for God and coming to him out of that need, and I can see how that influences the quality of my prayer.

Participants attended sessions they chose based on their interests and needs. The presenters and performers heard throughout the weekend were a Catholic who's who of well-known speakers, writers and singers from YouTube, apps, and the publishing world. They encouraged, inspired, and challenged their audience. I was excited to see the prominent Catholic figures whose YouTube videos I watch so often, especially Fr. Mike Schmitz and Bishop Robert Barron.

While I don't watch "The Chosen," I was bowled over by Jonathan Roumie's presence there, and touched by his humility and sincerity. He had come right after filming the Last Supper scenes for the program and gave a dramatic reading of the eucharistic prayer of Jesus in the Gospel according to St. John.

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Additional pilgrims came for the eucharistic procession. Thousands of adorers joined the procession in downtown Indianapolis. People lined the streets while the line passed, waving and cheering, going down on their knees when the monstrance was near. The procession was led by children who recently received Communion, dressed in their first Communion suits and dresses. They were followed by members of lay ecclesial movements, religious sisters and brothers, priests and bishops. They walked to a park where they prayed the Divine Mercy Chaplet and spent time in adoration. Our gathering in the eucharistic procession together was a witness to the people of Indianapolis and the world.

Throughout the weekend, they played "Walk with One" videos, which focused on the importance of reaching out to those we know as a way of evangelizing. There's a program to keep that initiative going post-congress. At closing Mass, everyone was sent as eucharistic missionaries, which starts the Year of Mission. The movement continues! The next eucharistic congress is in 2033, but there will be a eucharistic pilgrimage is in the spring of 2025. There may be more to come, too!

The National Eucharistic Congress was a powerful experience for all involved. The gifts and graces received by the participants will be felt for a long time. It was a true

revival for the Catholic Church that promises to bear much fruit. I loved participating in the larger church in this way, especially during exposition. The Eucharist, which has always been a part of my life, had become familiar. The eucharistic congress rekindled my love for Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament.