

A Night of Remembrance and Respect At St. Francis Xavier Parish

by Jeremy Ramirez Garcia
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JERSEYVILLE - St. Francis Xavier Church Parish in Jerseyville had a beautiful celebration and remembrance for Armed Forces Veterans in attendance at Friday night's special Mass. Following the remembrance, the first hymn "God Bless America" was sung gracefully by the children's choir.

More than 100 were in attendance last night at St. Francis Xavier's local parish. Father Marty Smith, with help from Alex Foster, and the Ladies of the Altar Society were successfully able to plan and execute the annual tradition of the Veteran's Day Mass.

Father Marty described Veterans Day as a "very very special day" for himself, and for the veterans in the church and community. Father Marty came from a military family with generations serving before him. At age 17 Father Marty enlisted. He completed Basic Training at Ft. Jackson in South Carolina.

The Father joined the Army right after the 9/11 attacks. He described it as a very scary time from going from a peacetime military to a wartime military. Eventually, he deployed to Iraq. After his tour of service Father Marty stated he wanted to keep the remembrance, teach the next generation, and highlight the sacrifice of our men and women. "To recognize that sacrifice, it's what Jesus is calling us to do. To serve and give" said Father Marty.

When one visits St. Francis Xavier Church they might notice a mass kit. Father Marty was able to obtain the mass kit through a wonderful story. During his basic training, Father Marty was able to build a relationship with an army chaplain who served in Vietnam.

At the end of Father Marty's training, he thanked the chaplain and thought it would be the last that he saw of him. Father Marty later then became a paratrooper and was assigned to the 82nd Airborne in Iraq. When Father Marty came back to the homeland, he needed to have surgery on his knee. To his surprise, the chaplain at the army hospital ended up being the same chaplain from Father Marty basic training days, Father Langston. Just a couple of years ago Father Marty and Father Langston reconnected once again.

Father Langston decided to offer Marty Smith his Mass Kit from Father Langston's time serving in Vietnam. With open arms Father Marty decided to accept the kit and has kept it since. The Mass Kit that Father Marty has is an Army-issued combat chaplain bag and it comes with so much history. Father Langston would carry the mass kit into combat zones during the Vietnam War. During rest periods the Father and the soldiers would be able to celebrate mass. In the kit were homemade vestments, chalices, patens, candle holders, crucifix, clothes, bread, and wine for service in the field. With great honor, Father Marty holds the mass kit today and, makes sure it's still used and that people remember the story that comes with it.

Some of the veterans who attended the service included Tammy Flowers who served in the Marine Corps. To her, having the service felt like a privilege. Her daughter was

singing tonight in the school choir. When asked what it meant to her to be a Veteran she said “it means to be strong, and happy to do it.”

Ben Stinnett (Army), Terry Day (Army), and Mary Vogel (Army) were also in attendance. This was Ben Stinnett's first time being able to attend the Veteran's Day Mass at St. Francis Xavier church.

When asked what the service meant to him he said, “Respect, it is really nice to be recognized in the church.” Terry Day, who served in the Army said that to this day if needed, he'd be willing to go back and serve. “I have a lot of pride for God and country.”

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