News



Boston Archbishop Richard Henning offers blessings from the sea near Fan Pier Park during "Into the deep," a June 21-22 eucharistic procession. The crowd sang "Amazing Grace" as he arrived in a borrowed boat, Shepherd's Pie." In the distance is the Charlestown Navy Yard, home to the USS Constitution. (Greta Gaffin)

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Eucharistic processions during the feast of Corpus Christi give parishes a chance to bring Jesus out of a church building and into the streets. Processions are usually just that — a crowd of people walking together. But this year, in Boston, the new archbishop wanted to do something different. He wanted to bring Jesus by boat.

"When I look out onto the ocean, I just find it a place that's easy to pray, easy to sense the presence of God, the truth of the infinite," Archbishop Richard Henning, who was installed Oct. 31, said in a diocesan video about the event.

"Into the deep," the Boston Archdiocese's two-day ocean eucharistic procession was held on Saturday, June 21, in communities on Massachusetts' North Shore, and on Sunday, June 22, around Boston Harbor.

A first for Boston, there have been eucharistic processions by boat in New York City and by riverboat in Mississippi. It took immense planning to coordinate, not only with each pastor at local parishes, but also with each town or city harbormaster.

The archdiocese borrowed a boat, named "Shepherd's Pie" from Mark Shepherd. It also borrowed a large monstrance — 51 inches tall with a 5.5 inch lunette — from the neighboring Diocese of Worcester, Massachusetts.

Liz Cotrupi, director of family life and ecclesial movements, told National Catholic Reporter that pastors and parishes were excited to participate. People from the South Shore asked if a Eucharistic procession by sea could happen there next year, she said.

Sunday's procession

Henning, accompanied by Fr. Paul Wargovich and Fr. Dan Hennessey, visited five sites in Boston on June 22. At each site, Henning preached on John 6:24-35, the Gospel passage in which the crowd gets into boats to search for Jesus. (Greta Gaffin)

East Boston/Piers Park

The Boston Archdiocese's eucharistic procession started at Piers Park in East Boston, a predominantly working-class neighborhood home to many immigrants from Guatemalan and El Salvador. Many members of the Laicos Servidores de la Palabra (Lay Servants of the Word), a Latino evangelization group were present, as were sisters from its affiliated religious order, Hermanas Misioneras Servidoras de la Palabra (Missionary Sisters Servants of the Word).



Before the Shepherd's Pie, the boat carrying the bishop, arrived children danced to Spanish religious music. (Greta Gaffin)



The eucharistic canopy needed some untangling before it could be used. (Greta Gaffin)



Boston Archbishop Richard Henning, who is fluent in Spanish, addressed the crowd in both Spanish and English. He spoke about Jesus offering himself in service to others. (Greta Gaffin)

The North End/Christopher Columbus Park

The next stop was Christopher Columbus Park in the North End, Boston's Italian American neighborhood. In recent years, many people have moved to the suburbs, but there is still a strong Italian presence in the neighborhood. "I suspect the people of the North End understand the importance of bread better than most, considering you have the best bakeries in New England," Henning said.



Franciscan Fr. Michael Della Penna led the crowd in the rosary before the boat arrived and offered teachings about the different mysteries. A native son of the North End, he is the pastor at St. Leonard of Port Maurice Parish. The banners represent different saints' societies. During the summer, each society sponsors a feast for their patron saint and leads a procession through the neighborhood. (Greta Gaffin)



The boat Shepherd's Pie waits at the dock as members of the procession walk to meet it. (Greta Gaffin)



The procession walks toward the altar, with Boston's Custom House in the background. (Greta Gaffin)

The Seaport/Fan Pier

The Seaport is Boston's newest neighborhood. Until the 21st century, it was a maritime industrial zone. Immense development means it now has thousands of residents, but the neighborhood has no fire station, police department or elementary school. The one institution is its Catholic parish, Our Lady of Good Voyage.

South Boston Yacht Club/Gate of Heaven

South Boston is an Irish American neighborhood. In recent years, gentrification has crowded out many of its working-class residents, but the last redoubt of the "old Southie" is here at the edge in City Point. It is a richly Catholic neighborhood: heading east from the yacht club leads to an ice rink named for Francis Murphy, a firefighter who had planned to enter the priesthood before dying in a fire in 1964. Heading west leads to a statue of Fr. Joseph Laporte, who was the curate at Gate of

Heaven Church and beloved by local youth until he died of leukemia in 1965.



Fr. Peter Schirripa, parochial vicar at Gate of Heaven and St. Brigid of Kildare Parish, follows altar boys to the street. (Greta Gaffin)



In Boston, the reminder of clerical sexual abuse is omnipresent. (Greta Gaffin)



The procession wended its way through the narrow streets of South Boston. Behind the Eucharistic canopy were sisters of the Missionaries of Charity, who have a house in nearby Dorchester. Almost immediately after leaving the yacht club, the procession passed the public elementary school attended by South Boston's most prominent ecclesiastical son, Cardinal Richard Cushing, who served as Boston archbishop 1944-1970. A County Kerry flag flies at one house, and a Pride flag hangs from another. The procession stopped to bless people at two places: the fire station and a house for men in recovery from alcoholism. (Greta Gaffin)



A bagpiper plays as the procession reached the Gate of Heaven Church in South Boston. (Greta Gaffin)



Boston Archbishop Richard Henning celebrates Mass with parish clergy, Fr. Robert Casey and Fr. Peter Schirripa, and with Auxiliary Bishops Mark O'Connell and Cristiano Barbosa. (Greta Gaffin)