

Ss. Robert and William School Students Learn and Live the Real Meaning of Lent

By Kristi Ward

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Remember Saturdays as a kid? No school and few responsibilities meant a leisurely day of sleeping in, watching cartoons, playing with friends and having fun. That's why 54 students at Ss. Robert and William Catholic School in Euclid earned a special place in the hearts of teachers, clergy and their parents.

"A total of 54 students gave up an entire Saturday to fast, pray and reflect on the meaning of Lent," said Laurie Heintz, a religion teacher at Ss. Robert and William Catholic School. Heintz and fellow religion teacher Rich Smith coordinated the day-long program called "Famine."

"Mr. Smith and I are so moved by the amount of children who gave up their day for these activities, to really learn, and actually live and follow the life of Christ in his missions. God bless each and every one of these children. They have touched our hearts today in ways that they will never know."

Throughout the day, Heintz and Smith kept the students busy making special yarn-covered crosses called God's Eyes, as well as Rosaries. Even though these students were fasting, they still baked cupcakes, cookies and brownies for the parish's Community Meal this month.

"No licking of fingers was allowed!" added Heintz. "The God's Eyes crafts will be given to guests at the Community Meal served at the parish this month."

From beginning to end, the day was special. The day started with a prayer service about lent and fasting, which was very emotional, bringing tears to the eyes of some of the children.

Because Ss. Robert and William Catholic School has been raising money for "Schools for Water," a non-profit organization trying to get clean water in Africa, the group chose to hold a water relay race where the children had to carry jugs of water like the children do in Kenya.

“In Kenya, the children walk four miles to get their water. Doing this team activity was a realization of how hard it is for the children there who walk in heavy rain with wild animals around just to get clean water. The jugs are extremely heavy, as the students found out today,” Heintz said.

Patrick Sweet, a fifth grade participant, said, “We experienced what it was like for the kids in Africa who have to carry 20 pounds of water for four miles. I only had to carry it five or seven feet and they have to carry it for miles.” Sweet said he would now be more thankful whenever he turns on a water faucet.

Smith added, “When we did the Water Relays the students relayed a 20lb jerry can a few feet and back going half the length of a parking section. They were exhausted after it was done, but they came to appreciate the children who walk for 8 hours a day to get water for their families in Africa. It was truly a moving moment as they literally walked a mile in their shoes.”

While crafts, baking and the water relay were important learning activities, the group also took a lot of time to reflect on God and the meaning behind certain Biblical stories with Deacon Peter Kovacina, who read and discussed Scripture Passages with the children.

Erin Ward, a seventh grade participant, said, “We discussed Bible verses and then I had a better understanding of them. Everyone was really listening to him. It seemed like everyone understood the verses more after he talked with us.”

The group also did the Stations of the Cross around Campus. Students rotated holding the cross as they walked in silence. Students formed a large circle around the cross as it was held up for the closing prayer of the Stations, which was very moving for the students to watch.

“There were so many powerful moments for me during this retreat,” said Smith. “When we did the Walking Stations of the Cross, a couple of neighbors came outside to see what we were doing. I was totally moved when they saw the students walking with the cross and they stopped to be reverent as well.” Fourth grade student Kayla Granito added, “Doing the Stations of the Cross outside made me realize what Jesus went through for us.”

To end the day, the students attended 4 p.m. Mass together where Father David Novak, who works with the fourth, fifth and sixth grade students, presided with Deacon Peter.

“It was touching how both Father Novak and Deacon Peter included the children with praise for all of their hard work and dedication for the work for

our Lord. The children were given the right boost to make it through the rest of the day,” said Heintz.

Smith added, “The students were so tired and were starting to fizzle by the time we arrived at Mass, but were energized when the congregation showed their support for what they had accomplished today. When we arrived at the dinner, their energy was renewed.”

After the full day of activities and fasting, the group shared a meal together to break the fast. The children made their own chicken noodle soup and chili during the day. Sandwiches and potato salad were also brought in.

“That was the best ham and cheese sandwich I’ve ever had in my life,” said Sarah Ward, a fifth grade student, who wasn’t so sure of her ability to fast for a whole day.

According to Heintz and Smith, the program was well supported by clergy and school teaching staff.

“Father John Betters, pastor at Ss. Robert and William, stopped by to see the students doing the water relay races. Father Novak stopped by in the Upper Hall to see how things were going. Father Goebel talked to the children before Mass and encouraged them for all they did today. Our principal, Ms. Susan Pohly, came by to see the kids in action. It was great to have all of the clergy present in this special day,” Heintz said.

“I was so proud of these young people and their desire to grow in their faith and understanding of the sufferings of humanity,” said Father Betters.

Teachers took time out of their day off to help and show their support of the students. Mrs. Terri Rando worked all day in the kitchen making soups and baked goods with the students. Miss Kristin Harkey worked on the God's Eyes craft with the kids and other craft activities all day. Mrs. Andrea Ralph helped with the meal and cleaning. Mrs. Donica Coe helped us with the meal. Miss Mary O'Neil helped with making the Rosaries and saying the Hail Mary while shooting baskets in the gym. Youth Minister Chris Kelley spoke about Lent and Fasting. All the faculty and staff donated all the baking materials (eggs, oil, cookie mix, brownie mix, cupcake mix) as well as bottled water for each child.

“We received donations from the school and parish staff, the school’s Parent Association, Parish Outreach and the support of some anonymous donors as well,” said Smith. “Not to mention the school staff that volunteered that day as well as the talented people who came to make rosary chaplets with the students, we couldn’t have done it without them.”

“Again, I can’t express how heart felt this day was for Mr. Smith and me,” said Heintz. “We truly wanted the children to live, see and believe the message of Lent. It truly was an amazing day that we hope we can continue as a tradition here for years to come.”

For more information about S. Robert and William Catholic School, visit www.srwschool.cc. For the parish, visit www.srweuclid.cc