

‘Christ became obedient for us even to death, dying on the cross. Therefore God raised him on high and gave him a name above all other names.’

Philippians 2: 8-9



Ramon Perez leads the procession down Ontario Street, away from the church.

## Living Stations of the Cross

The streets of Rochester were transformed on Good Friday into the road to Calvary, as the parishioners of Our Lady of Mt. Carmel presented their annual Living Stations of the Cross. Only the presence of police barricades and passing cars reminded spectators that what they were witnessing was actually a powerful dramatization of the Passion of Christ.

More than 150 people watched as Jesus, portrayed by Ramon Perez, took up his cross on Woodward Street. Later, Mary, played by Maria Martell of St. Michael's Parish, wept for him before the McFarlin Street backdrop. In a poignant representation of Christ's crucifixion, parishioners portraying Roman soldiers "nailed" Perez to the cross on Ontario Street, adjacent to the church. The sound of the heavy mallet striking the wooden cross made the simulation appear alarmingly realistic.

A solemn and reverent tone as well as several format modifications made this year's dramatization "one of the best ever," according to Father James E. Hewes, pastor of the predominantly Puerto Rican parish the last four years.

"In past years since I've been here, we began the regular Holy Friday service outside the church, but this year we had the opening prayer and the readings done inside," Father Hewes said. "We then had the procession around the neighborhood and finished the service inside the church."

Father Hewes commented on other changes in the stations such as the first-ever bilingual dramatization of the production as well as the use of a little "advertising" beforehand.

"Usually it (the stations) is done in all Spanish, but we know that people come from outside the church, so we wanted to involve English-speaking people as well," Father Hewes continued.

Father Hewes explained that Boy Scouts from the parish had visited neighborhood residents and distributed flyers to promote the stations. He said the advance publicity may have attracted a few more spectators than had attended in other years.

The Stations of the Cross procession is an integral part of the Puerto Rican faith tradition. Father Hewes explained that

the enactment at Mt. Carmel stems from the Vatican II emphasis on linking culture and faith.

"The procession is very common in Puerto Rico; it has become an important part of the Hispanic and Puerto Rican culture," Father Hewes said. "Rather than just seeing or hearing it (the Passion), they see everything acted out."

Combine all these factors with the balmy Good Friday weather and this year's shorter procession route, and the day turned out to be a "smooth" one, according to Father Hewes.

"I think the changes helped it go smoother, and there was a more prayerful and reverent atmosphere this year," Father Hewes reflected.

Sister Mary Regis Straughn, who has been at Mt. Carmel for 22 years, recalled the humble beginnings of the annual dramatization more than 16 years ago, and said that this year's dramatization was "polished a little bit" and "more realistic and meaningful to those who saw it and took part in it."

"It is a great witness to our faith when neighboring people, who are not of our faith, stand at attention as we go by," Sister Regis said. "The living message brings it home to their own lives and makes it more meaningful to them."

Sister Regis echoed Father Hewes' sentiments regarding the overall production.

"I think it was one of the best we've had," Sister Regis said. "All the different characters and scenes were all well-done."

"There was a real sense of reverence, and the people were very attentive to the spirit of the Passion," Sister Regis added.

Community involvement and police cooperation were vital to the production's success, according to both Father Hewes and Sister Regis. Officers from the Rochester Police Department set up road blocks to facilitate passage of the procession, and several policemen even joined in the march around the neighborhood.

Sister Regis also cited Ramon Perez' realistic portrayal of Jesus. "Ramon Perez really lived the part; he puts his whole sense of reverence into the part," Sister Regis said. "The stations mean a lot to the Spanish-speaking people around the neighborhood."



Perez' realistic reenactment of Jesus' death on the cross at the Twelfth Station was a poignant moment dramatization.