

San Juan Bautista: close to the heart of Puerto Rico

When he discovered in 1493 that the inhabitants of the small island called their home San Juan Bautista, Christopher Columbus was not deterred by his Catholicism in renaming the island Puerto Rico, or 'rich p

The name stuck, but St. John the Baptist remained the patron saint of the island and of its capital city, San Juan. And for Puerto-Rican Americans, the feast of St. John the Baptist's birth on June 24 remains an occasion to celebrate their religious and cultural heritage.

As they have for nearly a decade, people from Rochester's Hispanic parishes and communities gathered to mark the feast day with a special Mass, celebrated this year at Our Lady of Mount Carmel Church on June 25. Forming a parade complete with floats, parish banners and a festival queen, they then marched through the neighborhood. Afterward they enjoyed a picnic at the city's North Street recreation center, with traditional foods and games for both children and adults.

Back on the island, faith and culture are still almost inseparable. Each Puerto-Rican city and village has a patron saint whose feast day residents celebrate. On June 24, the whole island declares a religious and civic holiday.

Catholics typically begin with Mass or a novena in the morning, then adjourn to the beach, where they join people of other denominations for a picnic that lasts until the early morning.

"The only difference here is there's a smaller group. Not everyone participates," said Carmen Luciano who helped organize Rochester's first San Juan Bautista Festival ten years ago at St. Bridget's Church. Over the years, she added, the festival has changed as organizers have come and gone.

"The main thing is it's put together by the people themselves," Padilla said. "They do all the planning."

Quando Cristobal Colón descubrió la pequeña isla llamada San Juan por sus habitantes, su Catolicismo no le impidió quedarse en Puerto Rico.

A la isla se le dio el nombre de Puerto Rico, pero San Juan Bautista quedó como su santo patrón, y así también se llama la capital. Parea los puertorriqueños-americanos, el día de San Juan Bautista que se celebra el 24 de junio sigue siendo una ocasión para celebrar su herencia cultural y religiosa.

Como lo han hecho por casi una década, un grupo de personas de la comunidad y de las parroquias hispanas de la ciudad de Rochester se reunió para celebrar una misa especial, que tuvo lugar este año en la iglesia Monte Carmelo el día 25 de junio. Después de la misa se llevó a cabo un desfile con carrozas estandartes de las parroquias y una reina del festival. Luego disfrutaron de un pasadías con comidas y juegos tradicionales para niños y adultos, en el centro del recreo de la Calle North.

Allá en "la isla," la fe y la cultura casi



Jeff Goulding/Courier-Journal

Thomas August (center) and other festival organizers look over the route just prior to the start of the San Juan Bautista parade on June 25. The parade wound through area neighborhoods and ended at the North Street Recreation Center.



Carlos Vargas and Guan Lebron prepare the Eucharistic gifts for the special Mass that kicked off the San Juan Bautista festival.

son inseparable todavía. Cada ciudad y pueblo tiene un santo patrón cuya fiesta se celebra. El 24 de junio es un día de fiesta cívico y religioso en toda la isla.

Los Católicos por lo regular comienzan con una misa o una novena en la mañana, luego se van a las playas donde se unen a personas de otras denominaciones para celebrar hasta la madrugada.

"La única diferencia que hay aquí es que el grupo es más pequeño, no todos participan," dijo Carmen Luciano, quien ayudó a organizare el primer festival de San Juan Bautista que se llevó cabo en la Iglesia Santa Brígida, hace diez años. A través de los años, anadió, el festival ha cambrado según han ido cambrado según han ido cambrando los organizadores.

"La principa es que el festival es preparado por la gente misma," dijo Padilla. "Ellos planean todo."



Members of St. Francis/Holy Redeemer Parish participate in the parade by carrying banners.



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