

Rel 402 - Christianity

Visit to Iglesia Bautista Betesda

I was raised Roman Catholic and being Hispanic; it is a big part of culture for the most part. I have completed my sacraments up to my First Holy Communion. I have never had a consistent church attendance in terms of a yearly basis. Nonetheless, I would identify as Catholic. Roman Catholicism is all I have experienced firsthand.

Recently I had the pleasure of attending a Wednesday service at Iglesia Bautista Betesda, as a requirement of the optional criteria for this essay topic. This cozy little church has been around the corner from my house for years. It seemed natural to give it a try since it's so close, but far away in terms of my familiarity with what goes on in there. I called the church prior to my intended visit in order to better understand the hours of operation and if it was okay for me to visit the church. I received an enthusiastic invitation.

When I arrived there was no greeter, just people conversing with each other before the service started. I said Hi to those who smiled and made eye contact with me. There was no designated seating. I sat in the third row from the front in order to get a good feel for the atmosphere.

Pastor Elio Barrios conducted the service and right away I felt really relaxed. The vibe that his service was giving was not one of the ceremonial rigidity that I am accustomed to with the Catholic Church. He spoke in a friendly manner that did not imply any type of superiority. It has always appeared to me that the fathers of the Catholic Church view the attendees as if they are subordinates. I am not condemning the Catholic priests, just trying my best to describe the differences I noticed between these two traditions.

The Pastor's sermon focused on tips for better overall daily living. He began by speaking about how people lived before technology. He directly referred to technology as electricity. He explained that nobody really stayed up late when there was no electricity. People adhered more to the laws of nature or God by waking up and going to sleep when the sun rose or set. He explained that maybe because of this there were not as many crazy illnesses as we hear about today. People lived cleaner lives by going to bed at a decent hour. He wasn't condemning technology at all; he was just saying it'd be good for everybody if we went to bed at a decent hour. To rest appropriately is to strengthen the mind. Nobody can say that sleep isn't important. The moral of the man's story was simple and sincere. It was some of the most earnestly delivered advice I have ever heard from a public speaker.

He would refer back to God, Jesus, and the Bible throughout his speech. Divine reaffirmation was evidently prevalent, but it wasn't overbearing as I am traditionally accustomed. There was no Eucharist involved at all throughout this service. It seemed like this cozy little church that I never entered before was a home away from home for many of the people. Everyone was so friendly and the pastor was not intimidating at all. He carried himself with a sort of casual elegance that was every bit approachable. It was a very different experience from the boring one I had created in my mind prior to attending the church. The overall hospitable ambiance of this cozy little church made my experience a pleasant one.