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2011 ‘Grand Procession’ revives founding of L.A. Marian devotion

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The Grand Marian Procession started inside La Placita Church during the early afternoon of September 3, a day before the 230th founding and dedication of Los Angeles to Our Lady of the Angels.

“Here is where Los Angeles was born. Here is where our great city came to be,” said Claretian Father Roland Lozano, pastor of Los Angeles’ first church near what is now Cesar Chavez Avenue and Main Street.

Then the 300 modern-day pilgrims — representing the 44 people of Spanish, Indian and African-American ancestry who started their trip in Sonora, Mexico, and then, accompanied by four soldiers, trekked from the San Gabriel Mission to colonize the new settlement of “El Pueblo de Nuestra Senora Las Reina de Los Angeles” on Sept. 4, 1781 — processed down Main and Temple Streets to the Cathedral of Our Lady of the Angels.

On an ornate wood carriage, six members of Hermandad del Senor de Los Milagros, dressed in flowing colored robes, carried an almost life-sized statue of the Blessed Mother cradling a toddler Jesus. Aztec dancers performed to the pounding beat of a single drum. Bagpipers from the LAPD’s Emerald Society of Pipes and Drums played. And the slowly moving assembly sang “Ave Maria” and other hymns to the Mother of God.

“I think it’s important that we recognize the history of Los Angeles and how our Catholic faith played a big part in that history,” said walker and L.A. City Councilmember Tom LaBonge of the Fourth District. “And at the cathedral many times when we have marched it’s very sad, because we marched for a police officer’s or firefighter’s funeral. But today is a celebration.”

Erika Manier, 16, agreed. “I think it’s really cool — a lot of people coming together just to talk about Mary and celebrate together as a community,” said the junior at Immaculate Heart High School.

Larry Campitiello, master of the Southern California district of the Knights of Columbus, took part in the Marian event with more than 50 fellow members. “We’re pleased to be here because we’re celebrating Our Lady and we’re celebrating the birth of the city,” said the San Diego resident. “It’s just a great combination. Just a natural event.”

One of the honorary “Ladies of Grace” of the Ladies of Peter Claver from Holy Name of Jesus Church couldn’t march because of bad knees, but went instead directly to the cathedral’s plaza.

“This is just fabulous because they do this in European countries, and I’ve always wanted to be a part of one,” 71-year-old Jennie Dudley told The Tidings. “Carrying the statue, honoring Our Blessed Mother, to me that’s the ultimate.”

The procession also included Knights and Dames of Malta, Knights and Ladies of the Equestrian Order of the Holy Sepulcher, the Boys Scouts Color Guard, Adoracion Nocturna, Los Pobladores, Danza Zapopana and dozens of other organizations.

Archbishop José Gomez welcomed the marchers gathered around a makeshift stage in the plaza. He said it was fitting that the celebration continue at the cathedral named in honor of the patroness of the City of Los Angeles.

“Yesterday marked the ninth anniversary of the dedication of our cathedral,” he pointed out. “And tomorrow we are celebrating the 230th anniversary of the founding of Los Angeles by a small group of people who walked nine miles from Mission San Gabriel to what is now La Placita. So in many ways the people of Los Angeles are linked to the foundation of our Catholic faith here.”

After the outdoor recitation of the Rosary, the people processed behind the statue into the cathedral for Mass concelebrated by Msgr. Kevin Kostelnik, pastor, and 11 other priests. In his homily, he thanked the Queen of Angels Foundation for sponsoring the Marian happening. “You have reinvigorated a civic birthday celebration and an ancient religious observance,” he said.

After the liturgy, the founding chairman of the foundation praised the congregation for making the first Grand Marian Procession an historic event, which hasn’t been celebrated in the Southland for more than a century.

“We’ve come together in all of our diversity, with an emphasis on uniting the family of God in the public square, showing our faith beautifully — a concrete form of apologetics,” observed Mark Albert. “United we hit the street proclaiming the beauty and the treasures of the Catholic Church for the whole world to see.”

