



Desmond Tutu

By Hannah Carey | July 3, 2012

This morning I awoke at 6:15 in order to catch mass at St. George's Cathedral in the city. Now, this wasn't just any mass... It was a mass led by Desmond Tutu! I walked into the cathedral expecting to find all the pews filled with his supporters. Instead, all of us fit into a small section of the church meant for no more than fifty people. From my seat, I could feel Archbishop Tutu's warm presence and I instantly was at ease.

He asked that we call him "Father," and began the service by asking the visitors to introduce themselves and their reasons for being in Cape Town and at this service. In retrospect, I can see that by taking this interest in connecting with us, Father showed that his fame and accomplishments do not keep him from caring about the individual.

The service was relatively short, yet surprisingly emotional. Father did not deviate from the biblical text; there was no sermon written for the occasion. Despite this, I was close to tears as he blessed me during communion and all of us sat silently and prayed. There is something powerful about sitting in silence with a room full of people, especially when we are all connecting with our own spirituality.

We recited the Lord's Prayer with him in English, and he also read it in Afrikaans and Xhosa. Though many in the audience were foreigners like myself, I had the impression that there was never a moment any of us felt disconnected from Father, even through the language barrier. Simply to be in his presence was a gift. How amazing that a man can experience so much sadness in his country, yet be eighty years old and still smile.

My morning finished off with shaking Father's hand and having my photo taken with him. As I understand it, many Fridays he leads services at St. George's. For this I am lucky, because the intimate atmosphere of the smaller group allowed me to feel connected with the energy of the room and the honor that was his mass for us. The comment that kept coming up with the other students and me was, "He is so cute!!!" I would not have guessed a man so adorable and kind could have such an instrumental role in South Africa. He is living history, and still giving back. What a lovely way to begin my experience here!

