Fleet blessing concludes 39th Shrimp Festival

By PATRICIA CHAMBERS
Advertiser Correspondent
DELCAMBRE — Glinting steel sabers held aloft by Vermilion Parish Knights of Columbus formed an arch leading to the altar where the Fisherman's Mass was celebrated Sunday morning, on the closing day of the 39th Delcambre Shrimp Festival.

The prayers for divine intervention come in the midst of battle being fought by shrimpers against the forced use of turtle excluder devices when trolling. Shrimpers say the TEDs are breaking their financial backs. They prayed too for a successful inshore shrimping season, which starts today.

Concelebrants of the Mass, held in the Festival Association Building on the bank of the Delcambre Canal, included the Revs. Francis Theriault of Our Lady of the Lake and St. Martin de Porres Catholic churches in Delcambre; Ron Broussard of Our Lady of the Rosary Catholic Church in Kaplan and seminarian Gus Wall.

Many of the prayers recited during the Mass, including a reading from the Gospel of St. Luke, as well as offerings of salt and a small piece of shrimping net, and the traditional sacraments of bread and wine, all centered around the theme of fishing.

As the Mass ended, the Knights of Columbus escorted the festival's court and the clergy to the blessing of the fleet at the canal, alined with an armada of brightly decorated boats.

It took three shrimping boats to hold the festival dignitaries and the clergy: the lead vessel, the Captain Abbie, owned by Abbie Pierre of Delcambre, the Mary Donna, owned by Jesse Dobois, and My Girl, owned by Steve Broussard.

The three lead shrimpers, with masts pointing to the heavens, led the flotilla along the canal, which connects Lake Peigneur and Vermillon Bay.

Broussard blessed the shrimping boats in dock along the canal, and the crowds lining the banks. The blessings were administered by sprinkling Holy Water from a hand-held censer.

In addition to the thousands of regular festival-goers, there were some who were visiting Delcambre for the first time.

Roger Williams, a Natchitoches resident, said he came down to the festival on a spur-of-the-moment invitation from a friend, Ray Baumgarden of Leesville.

Neither had ever been to the festival before, "though I've passed through Delcambre and read about the Shrimp Festival for years," Baumgarden said. "I finally just decided to call Roger and say 'Let's go.' So here we are, I've really enjoyed the festival."

Williams said he liked the blessing of the fleet.

"I'm sure it has much more meaning to the people of the area," he said, "I'm deeply moved by the tradition of this event."

There were no mishaps at the festival, said Delcambre Police Chief Glen Dore

"We're very proud of the conduct of the people of the town of Delcambre as well as of our visitors," Dore' said. "There have been no problems."

Festival ceremonies

Top, The Rev. Ron Broussard blesses the shrimp fleet in Delcambre Canal Sunday during the 39th Shrimp Festival.

Thousands lined the canal banks to watch the ceremonies.

Right, Broussard shaves a word with Chassotay Jackson, 4, during the Fisherman's Mass, which included the offerings of salt and a small snippet of shrimping net.

Left, with Charles Bourque looking on, Rufus Miguez sells a portion of the 2,000 pounds of shrimp boiled during Sunday's final day of the festival.

Photos by:
Leo Bashinsky