



Well-Known Michaelangelo Statue 'Pietà' Unveiled at Rome Church

By Alana LaFlore
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ROME, N.Y. -- If you can't make it to Vatican City to see some of the world's most famous art masterpieces, a replica of what some say is Michelangelo's best work is now in Rome, New York.

Church of St. John the Baptist holds a special place in Richard Stewart Jr.'s heart. He grew up there, and when he had the opportunity to donate the Pietà, one of Michelangelo's famous sculptures, he jumped at the chance.

"Rome, New York; Rome, Italy. I'm a Roman, I'm an Italian." said Stewart. "This is where my folks were married, this is where my grandfolks were buried, and this is where my life started. The blessings that I received in the church as a child - there was no other consideration that a piece be placed here."

Stewart and his wife Esther were in Vatican City, when the opportunity to invest in Pietas that would be made from the original mold came up.

In 1938, just before the start of World War II, Vatican leaders made a mold to protect it in case the city was bombed. It depicts the Virgin Mary cradling Jesus after he was crucified.

"We ended up taking ownership of 11 pieces that we wanted to donate and we made sure that we had a contract that there would only be 112 of them made," said Stewart. "We wanted to make sure we could strategically place them around the world in places that actually emanate the symbolism of what the piece is all about - and that's love and forgiveness."

So far, the Pietà is in schools, libraries and churches in several states and Honduras. Stewart calls them a gift to humanity, as people who may have never made it to the Vatican will get the chance to see them.

Parishioners said they're proud to have a piece in Rome.

"It's just a beautiful piece of artwork and it's an honor to have it in our church.," said Jerry Corigliano. "I'm sure people from all over the state of New York will come to see the statue."

The Pietà was blessed at the end of Mass.

To thank the couple for their contribution, Rome's Mayor presented the Stewarts with a proclamation declaring Sunday, April 26 as Robert and Esther Stewart Day.