

Ephphatha. Be opened. For the Lord has done all things well.

This weekend, my friends, we celebrate our ministries and activities Sunday in which we highlight downstairs all the different ministries we have going on here at our church. Things that are for children, for young adults, for families – all ways to get involved.

Remember last year I announced three big amazing goals for our parish. The first is that we be a **Welcoming Parish**, a welcoming family to all those who we meet. Invite people to come to church. If they haven't been to church in a while, remind them it's an awesome thing! If they only come twice a year, invite them to come four times a year - that's doubling! The second is to be a Smart, that is an **Informed Parish** by means of technology. Look at our website, and the different things that it offers. Look at our different social media accounts, including Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. And finally, to get **more people to participate in our family** and the works of the Lord.

You know, when I was growing up, as a little kid, everyone in the house had a job to do. Mine was to take out the garbage, walk the dog, feed the dog, and wash the dishes. My sister would dry the dishes, put them away, and she would do the vacuuming. It's the same thing with our family here. Everyone needs to get involved!

We have our Parish Pastoral Council, our Parish Finance Council, and our Parish Building and Grounds Council. We have a safety committee, the food pantry, we have our CARE committee, the Knit Wits. We have pickleball and John Bower Basketball. We've got so many different things going on that I can't name them all right now. We have a tri-fold in which, if you want to do something, everything is listed out. And if you want to start something new, let us know. We are always open to trying new things, because as long as it's helping our family, it's a good thing!

Now that being said, I have something else to discuss today...

How many people here remember 9-11? How many people remember watching the towers burn on TV? Did you see the plane strike the second tower? When I saw it, at first, I thought I was watching a re-run of what happened the first time, and when they made the announcement that the other tower was hit, it was as if someone had stabbed me in the gut. My heart was wrenched for the people who died in those planes. My heart was wrenched for the families, and then for the first responders on the scene – the paramedics, the firefighters, the police officers. Just watching the TV and seeing people jumping out of the building – it was devastating. And I remember getting the urge to go to church and to pray. And churches were opening their doors that day and bells were ringing. I think it was, if I remember correctly, a Tuesday or a Wednesday, and I remember the lines to the confessionals were so long! People were there not only to pray for the victims, to pray for our nation – people were there to go to confession who hadn't been there in a long time. They wanted to pray. They wanted to unite themselves to the sacrifice of the Mass.

To offer to Jesus prayers to be strengthened in unity together. It was a time of atonement for all. Despite where people were in their lives, where they were in their journey, they wanted to be one with those who suffered.

We have had our own 9-11 recently. With the publication of the Grand Jury report, I don't know about you, but my heart was wrenched. I again felt like I was stabbed in the stomach. I was in pain, I couldn't talk about it at first because it was hurting me so badly. Then I didn't want to talk because I was angry and I just didn't know how to express myself. And then I started to think about the Lord Jesus and how awful it must be for Him and how painful to His heart all of this was. People starting coming to me and expressing the pain that they were experiencing in their hearts. My brother priests have told me how much they hurt and how they felt ashamed – ashamed of our brothers who had done this.

I remember several weeks ago, the Gospel from the Bread of Life discourse, when the people said, “this is a hard saying.” And Jesus's disciples started to leave. And when most of them had left, He turned to His apostles, and said, “Do you want to leave me, too?” And St. Peter stood up and said, “Lord, to whom should we go? You have the words of everlasting life.”

And there are people who want to leave the Catholic Church because of this, because of the pain and the shame that they feel. But we all need to know that these scoundrels who have betrayed God's Church, betrayed His people, and betrayed God himself, are wolves in sheep's clothing. They are not the Church. The Church is works of mercy, communal prayer, the celebration of the sacraments – especially this sacrament of the most sacred Body and Blood, Soul and Divinity of Jesus.

I have to thank you for being here, because you are the Church, too. You are the faithful ones. In spite of all of this garbage that has gone on, *you are still here to love Jesus*. And I just keep thinking how much this must grieve Him – to be betrayed by those who are supposed to be His closest friends, those who are supposed to be in authority, and defending His sheep.

I know the Church is a mixture of saints and sinners. It will always be, even until the end of time. Even at the Lord's mystery of the Last Supper, we know there were traitors. We can name them. Who was the one who went out and then there was darkness? Judas. Who was the one who denied the Lord three times? Peter. And he was our first leader of the Church. Even in the Church's history, there have been popes that we call “anti-popes” because they have not served God, they only served themselves.

My friends, our Church is not primarily an institution or an organization. Yes, we have some of those qualities, but first and foremost *we are the people of God* – we are Jesus's brothers and sisters. And we're here, not because of a person, but because we believe in the Church God founded. Will I let my faith be shaken because of traitors – those who have failed Him? No! But we need to remember to honor our Lord...because we love Him. If anyone asks you why are you still Catholic, you can tell them you believe in Jesus Christ and the Church He founded. And we can tell people that we are praying for the victims. We can say that we are praying for ourselves,

too, as we suffer through this time because when one member of the Body of Christ suffers we all suffer. But we need to know that Jesus who abides with us, who cares for us, who is the Head of the Body, the Head of the Church, He who is the Good Shepherd. It is Christ who conquers, Christ who reigns, and Christ, in the end, who will have the final say. He is the one cleaning His Church when those who should have couldn't. We need to always remember that the gates of hell will never prevail against His Church.

We profess our faith every Sunday and it's in God, not in human beings. The choice to stay or leave is ours. I understand that to stay is to choose to serve Christ and His Church – flawed and broken and wounded right now. Just as all of us are wounded. In spite of this tragedy, I have faith in the God-man, Jesus Christ, because it's by his death, by the blood poured out on that cross, by the water that came forth from His side, that we are cleansed and renewed.

Our Bishop has asked us to have a time of atonement and healing in the Diocese of Scranton. Starting on Thursday evening with confessions and adoration, we will begin a communal expression of prayer for the renewal of our Church. Right now, we are at a low point and we need Christ because we can't do it alone. I can't do this alone. My life as a priest is because of Him – His grace, His mercy, and His love. And always remember this **He loves you, He loves you, He love you!**

Let's pray for our family here at St. Ann, and let's ask our Patroness and Our Lady to be with us in this time of grief and suffering – that this cross we are all bearing right now with the victims and with Christ will make us stronger and He is the one who will make our family whole again. Because He can do all things and He does them well.

May Jesus Christ be praised. Now and forever.