

*When the time for Pentecost was fulfilled, they were all in one place together. And suddenly there came from the sky a noise like a strong driving wind, and it filled the entire house in which they were. Then there appeared to them tongues as of fire, which parted and came to rest on each one of them. And they were all filled with the holy Spirit....*

(Acts 2:1-4)

Dear Parishioners of St. Pius V,

As I write this letter, I am reflecting back to Pentecost in 2020. At Pentecost last year, we were just planning for the return to Masses at St. Pius. Deep down, I felt the Holy Spirit was directing me toward the field – not to the inside of the church. Looking back, I am grateful for the guidance of the Holy Spirit. We now know that returning to the church building would not have been the safest option for our parishioners. Now, for almost an entire year, we have enjoyed a smooth continuity in our celebrations of Masses, Sacraments, and other liturgical events, holding them outside, allowing us to renew and strengthen our faith without having to compromise the health and safety of those who attend in person. I am grateful that none of the clergy or staff members has been infected and there has been no outbreak of Covid infestation here at St. Pius V, neither in the church nor in the school. I also want you to know that all of our staff and clergy have received vaccinations so that we can serve more freely in our ministries.

The Gospel reading on the fourth Sunday of Easter was about the Good Shepherd: *“I am the good shepherd, and I know mine and mine know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I will lay down my life for the sheep.”* (John 10:14-15) As the shepherd of this parish, it is my solemn responsibility to care for our parishioners. I take this responsibility very seriously and will continue to do what is necessary to ensure the health and safety of all our parishioners whenever they are here at the church site, even if that choice may be unpopular with some people.

One of the great challenges of the past year, here and around the world, has been education. I want to take an opportunity to thank the faculty and staff of our parish school. Our school was open all year long and provided outstanding education to our students, both on-site and virtually. Every member of the school team worked tirelessly to ensure that our students are safe and healthy and that their education did not slip during this difficult year. We invested heavily in personal protection equipment, including plastic shields for every student’s desk, and in sanitation equipment. Our largest single investment was for a generator that produces hypochlorous acid (HClO) and the electrostatic sprayers to apply it. Hypochlorous acid is a disinfectant that is extremely effective against the coronavirus and, yet, does not harm students’ skin or lungs. We were honored, this year, to have other schools (public and parochial) visit our campus to learn about our procedures and incorporate them in their own schools. We will continue to use HClO as our disinfectant of choice in the future. Now we look forward to the next school year and increasing the number of families who join our school, confident in our academic program and in the safety protocols that are already in place and ready to be activated, if necessary.

Our Faith Formation program also had its challenges. Students were not allowed to come onto the campus and relied on virtual classes instead. We look forward to offering our Faith Formation classes in the Fall of this year, in a manner that ensures the health and safety of all. The Faith Formation team is currently planning a Eucharist 1 summer program. Further details will be forthcoming soon.

During the pandemic, many people were in desperate need of assistance. Thank you to those of you who have supported our St. Vincent de Paul ministry. Your contributions have helped carry on the mission of Christ in our community, allowing St. Vincent de Paul volunteers to make 557 deliveries, serving 1,366 people in Orange

County. With careful observance of safety protocols, none of our SVP volunteers were infected with the coronavirus.

As for the church, there is still much work to be completed in the renovation of the sanctuary and the font. Earlier this month, I was blessed to be able to travel to Italy (no easy feat!) to see our mosaic and select the marble for our new altar, ambo, chair, and font. I have posted some pictures to our Facebook page and will soon have a gallery page on our website. In Italy, I witnessed how very blessed we are in the United States. In Italy, only 16% of the population is currently fully vaccinated. When driving to the airport to return to the United States, I talked with my cab driver who mentioned that he was hoping for a miracle. When I asked him what miracle he wanted, so I could pray for his miracle, he said, “I am hoping for the miracle of receiving a vaccine.” His words touched me very deeply. We, in Orange County, not only have vaccines, we get to choose which vaccine we want to receive! People around the world are, quite literally, praying for the very vaccines that many people in the United States take for granted or, even worse, scoff. At this point, with vaccines readily available for all persons over the age of 12, only 48% of Orange County residents are fully vaccinated and the vulnerability level in Orange County remains high. Over 250,000 people in Orange County have died from Covid-19. I remind you that Pope Francis, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB), and Bishop Vann have all made it clear that receiving a vaccine for Covid-19 is not only safe but is a right and moral decision. I am asking you all to prayerfully consider vaccination, in consultation with your physician, if necessary. By receiving the vaccine, you are actively participating in making our parish, our community, and our world a safer place for all.

I want to express my gratitude for the understanding, kindness, and generosity of our parishioners during this time. I specifically thank our many volunteers for the time and energy they have spent to help with our Masses and our parishioners who have donated to our Pastoral Services Appeal (PSA). Having nearly met our diocesan obligation, going forward the proceeds will be rebated back to our parish and will be used to complete the funding necessary for the renovation of our church sanctuary. *Your continued contributions are vital to our parish life.* (I have heard people say, “Father, we don’t have the money to help.” Now, I know that many of you have enough to go to the shopping malls. The parking lots are full!)

*There are many kinds of spiritual gifts but the same Spirit; there are many forms of service but the same Lord; there are different workings but the same God who produces all of them in everyone.* (1 Corinthians 12:4-6)

As we celebrate Pentecost, the fruits of the Paschal mysteries are present in the lives of our parishioners and in their families. Jesus promised that he would not abandon us, but would send us the Advocate – the Holy Spirit – to guide us. I know that in my own life, I was able to receive the guidance I need by spending more time quietly listening. The works of the Holy Spirit are gradual and organic. There is no “one-stop drive-thru” approach to the Spirit’s direction. Scripture has shown us this over and over again. As we reflect on our own lives, we will see this is true. Hopefully, we will be inspired to some time to slow down and listen for the Spirit’s direction now.

May the gifts of the Holy Spirit, which we received in Baptism and which were sealed at Confirmation, be the groundwork upon which we build our lives. May we follow the example of Christ who “did not come to be served but to serve....” (Matthew 20:28). As believers in the promise of the Risen Christ, may we find assurance that we are a blessed people and that more blessings, and better days, are ahead of us.

Lord, send out your Spirit and renew the face of the earth!

Fr. Paw