

## **Town Hall II**

### **Opening Remarks**

The grace of our Lord Jesus, and the Love of God, and the Communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

What an honor and a privilege it is to serve in this beautiful place, where the faith has grown and maintained its life for over 175 years. Thanks to such a rich history, and a community of faith we have a place to worship, in truth, the living God Who promised life in abundance for us who believe.

God's Providence to this community is clear: we recall that St. Mary's church celebrated 175 years this year — that's 175 of spreading the Gospel, preserved, through wars, depressions, demographic shifts, political and social trends that has pushed our society to the brink. Yet, through it all, St. Mary's has been preserved and persevered to spread that Gospel. Ss. John and James Parish, too, has been a beacon of the faith; St. John the Baptist even today bears the mark of our rich heritage and chimes its testimony to the glory of God. Now, relying on God's Providence, these two communities united in the ONE faith are called to stand together as a mutual help and support for each other, in order to ensure our common future.

How privileged we are to share this inheritance, to be given such a magnificent tradition, to stand where our forebears have stood, to pray as they have prayed and

to hope in the Life they sought to provide. By the sweat of their brow, the work of their hands, and their generosity even in poverty, we can claim these churches to be OUR home. Indeed, their faith is our heritage, and those who came before us, who lived and believed, promised a future for us which they could only dream to have themselves. Like the candle on that first Easter morning, the flame of faith which grew from spark to flicker ignited the whole Christian community, has now been shared and spread and grown ever brighter; a flame divided but never dimmed now illuminates our way forward. Their faith, our inheritance, their work and dreams are realized in this, their legacy, and now our home.

Now it is our turn to join in their work. It is our turn to make a future for the next generation, to forge the storm that lies ahead and to hope for a better tomorrow. As we have received, so now we must lend a hand: as beneficiaries of such a great gift, we must be more than heirs, we must be caretakers. As faithful believers we must put our hand to the plow and give our voice to witness God's magnificent glory in our midst. We are not called to simply enjoy what was left to us, we must lend our hand, to work beside our forebears, stand with them, and create a future for this community which longs for heaven's glory.

Martin Luther King Jr. once said that "the measure of a man is not where he stands in times of comfort and convenience, but where he stands in the midst of challenge and controversy." Where will we stand? What will be our legacy? What

will they say of us when we have gone? Will they say that we enjoyed the fruits of a glorious heritage in its sunset years and then watched it fade away, or will they say that we saw it through the dark of night and provided that we could watch for a new dawn to break? My friends, we cannot be satisfied in thinking that we have had a good run — it is high time that we pick up our torch and enliven its flame.

There is a future for us. We have a future, and that future is made sure by the witness we bring to one another. For too long our communities have tried to grow on their own, but now it is time for us to band together and share our gifts and talents and grow as ONE. It is imperative, therefore, that you and I cherish each church building as our own. People who have grown up at St. Mary's should feel comfortable and at home within the walls of Saints John and James, and vice-versa. We need to take ownership and cherish each building as an asset to our community and parish family. I have heard rumblings where someone from one parish speaks poorly of the other parish: how tragic it is, that we can denounce a house of God, just because we are sour that we are in the situation we are in — a situation, I may add, which has been our own doing by not handing down the faith as we should, supporting vocations as we should, cherishing our faith as we ought to have cherished it. The challenge ahead can only begin when put aside our resentments and give this new situation our full cooperation and support. The Lord has provided for our times by allowing us to lean on one another, so that when challenged by the

changing tides we do not fall. There is strength here in standing together, even when it is difficult to imagine our future, and grace when we reach out in faith and hope for a better future with our brothers and sisters across the aisle.

We must unite — we must put aside the old yeast which may have been a cause for our divide and work together to ensure our tomorrow is brighter than our yesterday. We are called, my dear friends to make an act of faith and to walk together down this road with our prayers aloft so that God may bless us and continue the great legacy of which we have become heirs.

Let me first give you a glimpse at where we began as of July 1<sup>st</sup>:

- 1) When I came we began with a merged parish working with separate bank accounts.
- 1) Between the Parishes there are two cemeteries, two Church Buildings, Two Rectories, and one School building currently in use as an outreach center for the parish.
  - i. St. John and James has an outstanding debt owed to the diocese of about \$145,000 which has been incrementally paid down from over \$250,000 over the past few years. At present, St. Mary's has no outstanding debts or liabilities owed to anyone.
  - ii. Each parish has a cemetery, and has a fund which provides perpetual care. Both are underfunded. St. Mary's cemetery is about 50% funded and St. Joseph's cemetery is about 9% funded. This said, both committees have made admirable efforts in order to secure funding toward the perpetual care of our cemeteries. Now that we have started this plan, we can include this as part of our long-term planning.

- 2) Both parishes have maintained their own schedule for daily and weekly Masses.
  - i. Every week, not including weddings, funerals, or other services around the holy days or other special events, we offer 10 Masses a week - by one priest.
  - ii. On Saturday we have Mass at 4pm at St Mary, and 5:30 at SSJJ with a combined attendance at around 200 people.
  - iii. On Sunday I have Mass at 8:30 at SSJJ with about 250 people and growing. Then I have Mass at 10am at St. Mary's where about 75-90 people attend. Finally back at SSJJ for 11:30 Mass in Spanish, which usually sees about 50-80 people. From my estimation, each week we see about 500 souls weekly for Sunday Mass obligations.
    - i. Weekday Mass before I arrived saw about 15 souls combined.
      - i. Proudly, today that number has about doubled from 23-30 for daily Mass since we moved both Masses to St. Mary's.
      - i. As an Aside... Canon Law provides that each priest should say one mass a day, and if the need arises, he can say a second Mass. Between Saturday Evening and Sunday Morning I celebrate five consecutive Masses.
  - iv. Since July 1st, we have added adoration on Monday and Tuesday evening at each of the churches and have continued to offer adoration on Tuesday from 9am-3pm at SSJJ.
  - v. Before I arrived, confessions were by appointment only or before the vigil Mass. Now, we offer confessions twice weekly during the evenings coinciding with Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament.
  - vi. Last year we offered between the two churches 48 funerals and 2 weddings.

Now let us consider what have been up to since July 1st.

1. When I arrived there were a few insurance liabilities; these included a missing railing from the porch at Saints John and James, storage places that

had become hazardous by the number of things being poorly stored, cracks in sidewalks, broken windows, and other things.

- i. That said, since July 1st we have done the following:
  - i. Replaced the railing on the Rectory SSJJ
  - ii. We cleaned the stairs and sidewalk leading to the rectory, painted the staircase, and replaced needed boards leading up to the porch. We also replaced plywood boards that faced Washington St. With lattice work.
  - iii. We had a branch that hung over the rectory and could be downed by a powerful wind or severe snow — we removed the branch and all of the surrounding debris.
  - iv. RISE engineering came and prepared an “energy assessment” at both churches. Just by changing a few light fixtures and lightbulbs we are going to save the churches an average of \$2,000 yearly just in lighting. (Each lantern at SSJJ is currently running at 600 watts, with the new bulbs, each lantern will be running at 100 watts.)
  - v. We also had a meeting with Big Brother, Big Sisters for the collection bins that we have at SSJJ. We are grateful for their presence here tonight, and we are happy to say that we added a bin for collection at St. Mary’s Church as well, and we moved the bins from the corner of SSJJ where there was unwanted debris piling up to the other side, which, for now, has kept the corner clear of unwanted trash.
- 2) We have also begun working on the two Bazaars which are now underway, and from what I’ve seen so far, there is a group of wonderful, faithful volunteers who have done a great job, and I look forward to seeing it come to fruition!
- 3) We have also had some issues with the air conditioning units at St. Mary’s Church, which are currently being resolved. We have a contractor currently working on the system and hope to have a new system up and running soon.
- 4) We have also committed to do some painting — we’ve painted the front doors of SSJJ Church and the railings. And have committed to finishing the rest of the doors and railings.

- 5) I also have an Boy Scout who, for his Eagle Scout project, wants to refinish the decking on the porch of the rectory and repaint it in the spring.
- 6) Within our Parish we have a vibrant community of Spanish speakers. They are an asset within our parish, and they bring with them a rich heritage which is to be added to ours. As an essential part of our community, it is our duty to make sure that we help them to assimilate in our parish life. With that, we will begin offering an ESL course starting this upcoming Wednesday.
- 7) We also have plans to begin teaching our teens and young adults some life-skills. We have plans under way to offer them a life-skills class free of charge; this would include teaching them how to balance a checkbook, how to make a budget, how to write a resume, how to have a good job-interview. These are skills our teens need, and we would like to offer our help in their achieving it.

Now What's coming up:

Let me begin by way of a preface. We want our Church to be vibrant, we want our parish to have new life, and the status quo, as it stands, shows nothing but decline.

— Hand out sheets from the diocese —

We have been working in **maintenance mode** — where we try and keep things going, we try to tighten the belt, we try and keep everything afloat. But the Church is not grounded in Maintenance, it was made for MISSION. We need to be DRIVEN... MISSION ORIENTED.... Challenge the status quo, and become who we are — AMBASSADORS for the Gospel!

We want to be the exception to the rule: we need to be the outlier, if we want be successful and see our parish grow:

Here are a few areas, or marks of vitality for a parish:

- Good Worship that is well attended by people of every age

- Mission Oriented
- As a community they support and bring forth vocations to the priesthood and religious life.
- Engaged and Active Parishioners
  - There are three types of Parishioners:
    - Actively Engaged: they come to Mass every week, they are mission oriented, they take ownership and pride in their parish.
    - Engaged: they come to Mass occasionally, they say they are Catholic, and have some connection to the church — they live in maintenance mode — if something is broken they come to church to fix it.
    - Disengaged: these are parishioners who seldom come to Mass, save Christmas and Easter; they still think Msgr. Plante is the Pastor.

Truth is, I want to be more than a priest who says Mass for the community: I want to be your priest, and your pastor. The more Masses I say with fewer people takes away from my ability to visit the sick, minister at the hospital, offer devotions and confessions, teach in catechism and confirmation, as well as be available for whatever else you may need. We need to consolidate and make things work a little better for the whole of our community.

Therefore, starting on Christmas, we will have a modified Mass Schedule for both Parishes.

First with the CHRISTMAS MASS SCHEDULE:

4pm Vigil Mass at St Mary's Church

— Followed by Caroling and a small Christmas Party

Midnight Mass (AT MIDNIGHT) at Saints John and James

8:30am Mass at SSJJ

10am Mass at St. Mary's

Then we will begin a brand new mass schedule for both Parishes.

Here are some things that weighed into my decision on the Mass schedule moving forward:

- 1.) We have too many Masses for too few people.
  - SSJJ can hold everyone that comes to Mass for the entire weekend in ONE Mass, without an issue.
- 2.) I am NOT closing either Church Building and it is only proper that each Church should have a Mass on Sunday
- 3.) As the pastor I think it vital that I see our children in the catechism program, and that our children in catechism can have time for Mass on Sunday and Class, whether they want to go to SSJJ or St Mary's.
- 4.) We have a Spanish community which, it has seemed to me, to feel more like guests than residents.
  - Truthfully, what is needed now is cooperation and community, which cannot be possible when we aren't willing to make allowances for other people, whether that be a parking spot, a seat in the pew, or the language of a part in Mass. We need to be ONE Community who shares One Faith.
- 5.) It is healthy that with this new situation, everyone has to give a little, rather than only one community, or one church have to bear the burden of change.

To that end here is what I propose:

1.) Daily Mass will still be celebrated at St Mary's at 8am — First Friday Masses will be at SSJJ and *ad orientem*.

2.) We will move from having two Sat evening vigil Masses to one vigil Mass — The vigil will be held at SSJJ at 4:30 and I will now be available for confessions before Mass and even after for those who want it.

3.) In order to bring in the Spanish Community to the larger Parish by having a bilingual Mass on Sunday Morning at 8am at SSJJ. This bilingual Mass will have at least one reading in Spanish, a bilingual homily, and the Mass parts in Latin... “why Latin?” you say... Because, then everyone has something to learn together; also Latin is the official language of the Church.

4.) Mass is moved to 8am so that we can have Catechism start at 9.

5.) St. Mary's Church will have Mass at 10:30 on Sunday so that those attending catechism may still have the chance to go to Mass afterward within our Parish community.

Some change is necessary, and for the good of all, I've tried to be as fair and just as possible.

Now let me make it clear: I am not closing St. Mary's Church.

— To ensure its future, I am going to create an endowment for the Church building with any assets that remain after we finish all capital improvements. For as long as we can, we will take the interest earned on the principal and reinvest it for our future.

These are the capital improvements:

- The first is the air conditioning and heating system for the church and hall.
- We are going to raze the rectory building

- Then I would like to pave in its place a handicapped parking lot for the church.
- While we are paving, I want to build up the curb by the church so that we can redirect runoff water from the cemetery and hopefully stop the water coming into the church basement.
- I also would like to look at the mold in the Church basement that has built up over time because of the runoff water.

With these capital improvements finished, I am certain that we will be able to create an endowment for the Church building and its upkeep that will enable us to have assurances that our building will be in good repair for a long time down the road.

Advent is around the Corner:

I have invited my friend, Fr. Patrick Briscoe, OP to offer an Advent Mission — He will preach Masses on the Weekend of Dec. 7th-8th and then will offer his Mission Monday-Wed evening at both parishes.

Looking towards the spring —

During Lent, I will offer stations of the Cross twice on Friday: noon and at 7pm. I'm thinking that at noon we will hold stations at St Mary's and at 7pm we will have Stations of the Cross at SSJJ.

The liturgies for Holy Week and Easter will be held principally at SSJJ.

— On Holy Thursday we will offer the Mass of the Lord's Supper at Saints John and James and then process to Saint Mary's Church for the altar of repose.

— Good Friday will have Stations of the Cross at noon at St. Mary's

— 3pm we will offer Stations at SSJJ

— 7pm we will offer The Good Friday Service at SSJJ

— The Easter Vigil will be held at 8pm at SSJJ