

**MORE AT WILMORE**

Usually people stay home when the Bishop comes for a parish visit. There could be a number of reasons for that. I would rather not speculate on what the predominant reason for this is in the Diocese of Altoona-Johnstown. In any case, that was not the case in Wilmore on Friday, the 5<sup>th</sup> of May. The Bishop came, and the church was full.

A terrible thing happened to the faith community of Saint Bartholomew in Wilmore during the night of May 1 and 2. The church was broken into, the tabernacle thrown to the floor, and the Eucharist stolen, along with incense and several sacred vessels. This is a violation of such degree that the church could not be used for any type of service until a Service of Reparation was celebrated by the Bishop or his representative. Such a service occurred on Friday, May 5, at three in the afternoon.

They came in droves. Gathered in the parking lot were hundreds of people of various ages and from various parishes. Some were from outside of the Diocese. Former pastors came. They all came for the sole purpose of responding to the major desecration having taken place. And, in Christian solidarity, Metropolitan Nicholas of the Orthodox Diocese came unexpectedly to join with the Wilmore community in prayer. The mass media came without invitation to record the unique and powerful event. We, then, processed into the church, filling it to capacity.

Perhaps, those who perpetrated the desecration did not understand the sacredness of a space set aside for the worship of God, or the reality of Christ's presence in the Holy Eucharist. In which case, we could pray in the words of the Lord Jesus, "Forgive them, Father, for they know not what they do." On the other hand, perhaps, they did know. I am of the opinion that they intended to take the Eucharist precisely because it is the Body and Blood of Christ. In either case, justice needs to be left up to the Lord.

What is left for the parishioners of the parish to do is penance. That is not to say that the faith community of Saint Bartholomew should feel guilty of some transgression. (Although, it is always good to examine one's conscience, even that of an entire parish.) However, in Christian charity and as an act of reparation, they are called to do penance for those who perpetrated the desecration. The Lord made reparation for all of us on the cross. We need to do, likewise, for those who hurt us. In that way, we identify with Jesus and express our love for him in imitation of what He did for us.

I was very impressed with the faith that brought so many to Church Hill that Friday afternoon. It was a strong public demonstration of community and unity. Above all, it spoke to the world of a faithful witness to the reality of Christ's presence in the Eucharist. A gross violation had occurred to the parishioners of Saint Bartholomew's. So, they came to be healed, and their friends came to pray with them.

In the face of all this, Friday, May 5, was a day of hope. It brought the people of Saint Bartholomew's together like, perhaps, nothing ever has before. More than the usual was experienced at Wilmore on that day. As a result, they can look to a promising future, as they continue to witness to the reality of Christ among them.